

**THE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE AND KNOWLEDGE OF POWER: ENVISIONING
THE DISCOURSE OF BLACK EPISTEMOLOGIES IN AFRICANA PHILOSOPHY**

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

From its inception in the early 70s, formalized discourse in Africana philosophical scholarship in the United States has been plagued by a derelictical crisis—a crisis of knowledge. The first dimension of this crisis stems from the systems of knowledge generated within philosophical scholarship that does not primarily center the ideas and thought systems produced by Black thinkers as the groundwork for representing Blackness or cataloging the Black experience. The second concerns the tendency to project negative epistemic ascriptions to black subjects in current scholarship in social epistemology. This work engages with this problematic by visualizing a new sub-disciplinary focus within Africana philosophy, namely “Black Epistemology,” which offers a positive view of Blackness concerning the discourse of knowledge. The Black epistemological perspectives considered in this work explores the historiography of the Black intellectual tradition while drawing connections between ascriptions of agency and epistemic power about how the knowing Black subject is characterized as the ground for shaping reality, truth, and the world as we know it.

In this work, Black thinkers are not considered as mere commentators, critics, revolutionaries, or insurgents offering “mere ideological” critiques to hegemonic systems of knowledge and practices, but primarily as epistemologists—who are writing about the importance of knowledge towards achieving both individual freedom and social transformation in an anti-Black world. In this case, the two broad categories of Black epistemological thought that are explored in this work are (1) Black epistemologies as self or personal epistemologies, and (2) Black epistemologies as political epistemologies. It raises the question concerning what it means to think of Black thinkers as epistemologists, especially concerning the creation and

dissemination of knowledge in particular areas of inquiry. This indicates that epistemological considerations are not the prerogative of thinkers within western philosophical praxis; it is something that Black thinkers have given a great deal of consideration as well within Black intellectual history. Therefore, this necessitates the evolution of a Black epistemological inquiry within Africana philosophy.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Chief S.O. and Mrs. E.O. Ogungbure, for the countless sacrifices they have made to make it possible for me to chase my dreams.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The imperative task of Black Studies should be that of the rewriting of knowledge.
—Sylvia Wynter, 1984

If history is going to be scientific, if the record of human action is going to be set down with that accuracy and faithfulness of detail which allows its use as a measuring rod and guidepost for future of nations...shall we, not best guide humanity by telling the truth about all of this...?

—W.E.B. Du Bois, 1935

The 21st century will be marked by the struggles of people of color for position, credibility, and respect within western societies; and the struggles will have global implications.

—Beverly M. Gordon, 1990

From the Beginning Forward: The Struggle for Knowledge in Africana Philosophy

From its inception in the early 70s, formalized discourse in Africana philosophical scholarship in the United States was plagued by two distinctive but related issues. The first has to do with the quest by Black intellectuals to fashion a unique philosophical orientation whose vision of disciplinarity is focused primarily on the thoughts, travails, and lived experiences of African descended people. The second relates to the divination of a contextual framework required for the evolution of such disciplinary engagement, particularly focused on the discernment of what it means for a philosophy (Black/Africana philosophy) to be a “philosophy born of struggle” in the late twentieth century through early parts of the twenty-first century. Classic publications such as William R. Jones, “Crisis in Philosophy: The Black Presence,” in the *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association XLVII* (1973), and “The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy: Some Preliminary Considerations,” published in *The Philosophical Forum IX*, 2 (1977), and also Cornel West’s, “Philosophy and the Afro-American Experience,” *The Philosophical Forum 9* (2/3) (Winter-Spring 1977-78), are pivotal in highlighting the issues that confronted Black philosophical scholarship in the late twentieth century.¹ While Jones, in his 1973 and 1977 publications, was arguing for a philosophical paradigm that expresses the Black experience, Cornel West was arguing for the assimilation of Black experience within disciplinary theories and Eurocentric canons of thought. This was not the case for Jones, because philosophy, by its very nature is particularized. He argued that “[B]lack people dehumanize themselves if they fail to initiate a philosophical statement that faithfully expresses their experience and culture.”² Whereas, West maintains that “certain philosophical techniques, derived from a particular [Eurocentric—those of Martin Heidegger, the

later Wittgenstein, and John Dewey] conception of philosophy, can contribute to our understanding of the Afro-American experience.”³

The philosophical praxis that West recommends for Africana philosophy is fundamentally centered on an extraverted epistemology or an epistemological framework dependent on Eurocentric accretions or worldview, that merely straps along Black lives or the Black lived experience as an apron string to the Eurocentric experience—often characterized as an immaculate apron. But Jones vehemently disagrees with West on this point; as Jones sees it, what is at stake here is the power and epistemic authority to define reality. Thus, Blacks dehumanize themselves if they do not insist upon the right to make their history the point of departure for philosophizing.⁴ The disagreement here on the nature of Black philosophical engagement is not merely about methodology or the appropriate philosophical praxis to document the history of Black intellectual thought or philosophical musings; it is also at its very core, a disagreement on the vision of Blackness or Black humanity held by these thinkers.⁵ This disagreement is often implied in the way or manner in which classical and contemporary Africana or Black philosophers conceive of the thrust of Africana philosophy or the documentation of Black intellectual thought.

Other notable Black scholars such as E. Franklin Frazier, Vincent Harding, and Harold Cruse have weighed in on this issue regarding what should constitute the thrust of Black intellectual commitment. Frazier is famous for his characterization of the African American family as a unique sociological unit that lacks any peculiar cultural model other than the one imposed by white culture. This assumption is contingent upon the consequences of slavery which, for him, is primarily responsible for the destruction of the African social heritage. In *The Negro Family in the United States*, Frazier portrayed varying instances of the cultural dislocation

Black slaves experienced “to show how difficult it was for slaves, who had retained a memory of their African background, to find a congenial milieu in which to perpetuate the old way of life. Even before reaching the United States, slaves had often been subjected to influences that tended to destroy the significance and meaning of their African heritage.”⁶ Frazier would proceed based on this assumption, to hypothesize this as the reason for the African American family’s failure to assimilate European American cultural norms. That is, the cultural dislocation that Black slaves experienced occasioned a crisis of the Self and Being that led to other forms of pathological and socially or culturally discordant behaviors and non-assimilationist practices. Frazier’s concern over cultural conformity was particularly aimed at the degree to which African Americans had not internalized sexual monogamy as a cultural ideal in the New World.⁷ In fact, in an earlier publication, “Is the Negro Family a Unique Sociological Unit?” Frazier hypothesized that this lack of internalization varied by geographical area, assuming that the anonymity of urban life, as compared to the social control of rural life, served to undermine the solidarity of African American families. In this regard, Frazier viewed urbanization as a major hindrance and challenge to the stability of African American families.⁸

Although the conclusions drawn by Frazier highlights the devastating consequences of slavery on the Black experience of dehumanization and the rupturing of authentic African values for Black slaves, it also offered a narrative that portrayed the Black experience as encapsulated by whiteness or “white cultural ideals.” Especially his depiction of white cultural norms as the “normative” vehicle for cataloging the human experience, or more specifically, the Black experience. Frazier’s conclusions also raised questions concerning whether Black intellectuals should concern themselves with assimilationist or non-assimilationist approaches to the cataloging of the Black experience in the New World. In the latter parts of the twentieth century,

Vincent Harding challenged some of the hypotheses Frazier put forward in his earlier sociological studies. In his very instructive essay, “The Vocation of the Black Scholar and the Struggles of the Black Community,” Vincent Harding, in contradistinction to Frazier, warns against the uncritical acceptance of the wisdom of white America or white cultural ideals as a prism for understanding the Black experience. He describes the motivation for his argument thus:

we are constantly tempted by a strange and poignant set of yearnings to let white America’s style become our own, repeatedly forgetful that the best hopes and interests of the masses of black people have always been out of style in America (save for a few visionary and deceptively halcyon years in the 1860s and 1960s when our cause preoccupied, even obsessed, a nation). It is a warning because we are tempted to even now, in the midst of the stench of national corruption, to accept American definitions of wisdom, probity, and truth—or, worse, to accept America’s claims that such things are not worth discussing.⁹

For Harding, the characterization of the Black experience should not be subsumed under the hegemonic knowledge schemes or “wisdom” of white America because “once we recognize and admit that the mass of [B]lack people live as unmistakably colonized victims (yet courageously as more than victims) of white America, there is no escape from the knowledge that white America and its systems of domination are the enemy.”¹⁰ Harding thinks of the vocation of the Black scholar as the sum of the intellectual efforts that strive to document how the gifts of Black minds are meant to be fully used in the service of the Black community, as well as combatting the various forms of anti-blackness in the society at large.¹¹

This is why, Harold Cruse in, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, describes the role or vocation of the Black intellectual as a preoccupation that is trapped in a double-bind. This double-bind consists of “the peculiarities of the American social structure, and the position of the intellectual class within it, [which] make the functional role of the Negro intellectual a special one. The Negro [Black] intellectual must deal immediately with the white power structure and cultural apparatus, and inner realities of the [B]lack world at the same time.”¹² The idea of crisis

that Cruse emphasizes here hinges on the complexities embedded in the social polity, including class subtleties or stratifications that invariably influence the framework in which the Black intellectual theorizes. This occasions the cultural identity problem that confronts the Black intellectual, as Cruse describes it, “as long as the Negro [Black] intellectual is beset with his cultural identity problem, his attacks on American culture, as discriminatory, become hollow: two cultural negatives cannot possibly add up to a cultural positive in society at large.”¹³ For him, therefore, “the functional role of the Negro [Black] intellectual demands that he cannot be absolutely separated from wither the black or white world.”¹⁴ However, if the causative element of what Cruse refers to as “the cultural identity problem” is the hegemonic imposition of white American values and ideologies as a heuristic for categorizing the Black experience, then an argument can be made that scholarly efforts to break away from such, may be conceived as a positive intellectual engagement towards fashioning authentic Black cultural perspectives in a plural world. The foregoing analysis indicates how Black thinkers have visualized the thrust of Black intellectual engagement in the new world. Although these philosophers differ in terms of how and what they conceive as the thrust of Black intellectual engagement, as well as the designation of the task or vocation of the Black scholar, they are united by their efforts to provide some kind of conceptual clarification of the nature and subject matter of this field of human inquiry.

In his classical essay titled “Africana Philosophy,”¹⁵ Lucius Outlaw describes his vision for this field of inquiry as “a gathering notion under which to situate the articulations (writings, speeches, etc.), and traditions of the same, of Africans and peoples of African descent collectively, as well as the sub-discipline- or field-forming, tradition-defining, tradition-organizing reconstructive efforts which are (to be) regarded as philosophy.”¹⁶ Although Outlaw

maintains that the thrust of this field of inquiry should focus on Africans and peoples of African descent collectively; he would go on to claim that Africana philosophy should also “include the work of those persons who are neither African nor of African descent but who recognize the legitimacy and importance of the issues and endeavors that constitute the philosophizing of persons African or African-descended and who contribute to discussions of their efforts, persons whose work justifies their being called Africanists.”¹⁷ What is immediately apparent from Outlaw’s conception of the sub-disciplinary focus of Africana philosophy is that it should go beyond the articulation of the thought systems and intellectual production of Africans of African descended peoples to include others who may not identify as part of this racial group. In more explicit terms, the works of European or Caucasian philosophers can be adequately regarded as works of Africana philosophy, insofar as they can justify such works to pertain to the lives of Black people. This means the gamut of scholarship that pertain to the lived experience of Black people can then take on a Eurocentric posture. This nuanced position by Outlaw is even more pronounced in his work *On Race and Philosophy*, where he describes the task of Black philosophy as the “quest to revise the philosophical canon to include articulations by African and African-descended thinkers.”¹⁸ In the first instance, the revisionist imaginary that Outlaw talks about here plays on the thinking that the hegemonic posture of the “philosophical canon,” more specifically the Eurocentric and Anglo-American canon, will wholeheartedly embrace the “inclusion” of Blacks or African-descendants within its hallowed circles. The racialized and hierarchical epistemological set-up of these alien philosophical praxis, which places knowledge schemes produced by Caucasians over and above that produced by those classified as “others” will always be antithetical to the revisionist-integrationist project that Outlaw has in mind.

More so, on Outlaw's assumption that works produced by Europeans or Caucasian philosophers can be counted as works of Africana philosophy, one can see that he was trying to escape the challenge of particularity to embrace a more universal appeal in his imagination of a disciplinary focus for Africana philosophy. However, it is difficult to imagine the viability of such kinds of intellectual production envisioned by Outlaw, given the fact that non-Black scholars will not and cannot have a tincture of the Black experience to draw from to make their contributions useful. More so, Outlaw's description engenders the problem of "epistemological masquerading" described by Carter G. Woodson in *The Mis-Education of the Negro*; this is the problem that ensues when Black philosophers and scholars are parroting the thoughts of European thinkers as grounds or fodder for studying Black people as a pseudo-universal lens for viewing the world. As Woodson succinctly argues:

To be more explicit we may go to the seat of the trouble. Our most widely known scholars have been trained in universities outside of the South. Northern and Western institutions, however, have had no time to deal with matters which concern the Negro [Blacks] especially. They must direct their attention to the problems of the majority of their constituents, and too often they have stimulated their prejudices by referring to the Negro [Blacks] as unworthy of consideration. Most of what these universities have offered as language, mathematics, and science may have served a good purpose, but much of what they have taught as economics, history, literature, religion, and philosophy is propaganda and cant that involved a waste of time and misdirected the Negroes [Blacks] thus trained. And even in the certitude of science or mathematics it has been unfortunate that the approach to the Negro [Blacks] has been borrowed from a "foreign" method.¹⁹

It is apparent from the citation above that Woodson is averse to some kinds of scholarly engagement or intellectual endeavor that does not prioritize Black people as the source of knowledge production and the grounds for self-respect. Woodson's position is informed by his insights regarding the dangers he conceived to be inherent in deploying a Eurocentric ideological framework or lens for study Black people. This danger borders on the dual axis of colonial-hegemonic logics embedded in Eurocentric systems of thought. He divines that while such

colonial-hegemonic logic, on the one hand, aims to undermine Black intelligence; on the other hand, it aims to privilege white systems of thinking as the prime conceptual apparatus for viewing the world.

This would lead Woodson to argue in *The Negro in Our History*, that “the African [Black] mind exhibited [during the years before the colonial exploitation of Africa by Europeans and Americans], evidence of philosophy not to be despised. The native philosopher found three friends in “courage, sense, and insight.” The African realized that the “lack of knowledge is darker than night,” that an ignorant man is a slave,” and that “whoever works without knowledge works uselessly.”²⁰ With these assertions, Woodson acknowledges Black genius and the fecundity of the Black mind, in terms of its philosophical and epistemological accomplishments, before the tragedy of colonial exploitation and oppression. For Woodson, the same thought process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile will invariably depress and crush at the same time the spark of genius in Black people by making them feel that their race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples.²¹ This understanding is what reinforced his position that the anthropological and ontological assumptions of European science such as economics and modern European history deeply misunderstands the actual condition of Black people and cannot address their existential conditions. As Ama Mazama observes, Eurocentric assumptions of African intellectual inferiority and inadequacy have deep and pervasive roots in modern European intellectual history and concepts.”²² This is why Woodson considers the suggestion that systems of thoughts or intellectual frameworks that are external to the Black lived experience, especially Eurocentric systems, as problematic.

This intellectual musing on the appropriate methodological approach to utilize in the study of Black people within Africana philosophy is also topical in contemporary scholarship. In “Disciplinary Decadence and the Decolonization of Knowledge,” Lewis Gordon articulates a definition of Africana philosophy that he envisages would subvert what he characterizes as the problem of disciplinary decadence— “an inward path of disciplinary solitude.”²³ For him, the thrust of Africana philosophy should be on the “the exploration of modern life as understood through contradictions raised by the lived-reality of African Diasporic people. Because such people are often linked to many other communities whose humanity has been challenged, African philosophy is also a philosophy that speaks beyond the Africana community.”²⁴ The justification that Gordon cites as the basis for projecting the sub-disciplinary focus of Africana philosophy beyond Black people has to do with the desire to emphasize the notion of existential plurality and the nexus of human social relationships, but this may end up obfuscating the specific issues and problems of Black people in a world where the devaluation of Blackness is marshaled into the social fabric. There is also the unmistakable, albeit implicit reference to the specter of universalism or pluralism in the characterization and vision of Africana philosophy within the definition that Gordon articulates, especially the emphasis on “the nexus of human social relationships.”

This approach to conceptual universalism in Gordon’s scholarship is evident in *Bad Faith and Anti-Black Racism*, where Sartrean existential ontology is employed to attempt an “analysis of blackness as a mode of being beneath the scheme of whiteness in an antiblack world. Yet a conclusion of a Sartrean analysis is that antiblack racism is a contingent (though accidental) feature of our world. There could very well have been an interpretation of blackness as fullness and whiteness as the emptiness that threatens it.”²⁵ The exploitation of Sartrean existential

ontology in this work was aimed at characterizing the specter of anti-black racism as a form of bad faith. In this imagination what is considered “existential about racism is that it is a form of bad faith, which is a phenomenological ontological or existential-phenomenological concept.”²⁶ This then brings up the larger issue of the applicability or plausibility of deploying Eurocentric conceptual and philosophical frames, such as Sartre’s existentialism, to apprehend the Black experience. While it is quite common to see Africana/Black philosophers arguing for the significance of Eurocentric and Americanized ideas in characterizing and qualifying the Black experience, it is rare to see European and American philosophers making similar arguments about using the ideas developed by Black philosophers or intellectuals to interpret existential problems within such cultural framework.

It is important to note that Gordon’s exploration of such “pluralistic” methodology, is motivated by the hope that people come to the understanding that “these considerations bring us to a matter in which the relationship between bad faith and antiblack racism is of great importance: the problem of legitimacy in the human sciences.”²⁷ What this line of reason implies, if followed to its logical conclusion is that it does not matter what specific philosophical framework, model or orientation are utilized to apprehend Black experience; what truly matters, for Gordon, is the type(s) of questions that are being asked, especially the question of the human—the true kernel of existential philosophy. For him “existential philosophy addresses problems of freedom, anguish, dread, responsibility, embodied agency, sociality, and liberation; it addresses these problems through a focus on the human condition.”²⁸ He sees Sartre as a philosopher, whose philosophy speaks to and beyond the Africana community. As he argues in *Existential Africana*, Sartre stands as an unusual catalyst in the history of Black existential philosophy. He describes Sartre as an intellectual-genealogical link or the forerunner of the ideas

between Richard Wright and Franz Fanon (undoubtedly the twentieth century's two most influential African existentialist "men of letters") and the historical forces that came into play for the ascendance of European philosophy of existence in the American academy.²⁹ One wonders how to reconcile this Eurocentric existential philosophical method advocated by Gordon as a framework for understanding Fanon's critical and anti-colonial philosophy. We know, for instance, that in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon emphasized "Black Consciousness" as an alternative model of theorizing about the Black lived experience in an antiblack world. Fanon sees Black consciousness as "immanent in itself," which means that it is its logos, episteme, and existential grounding for Blackness, and as such does not require any Eurocentric philosophical frames for interpreting the Black experience. This is why Fanon argues that because Black consciousness helps him to see that he is fully human, he does "not have to look for the universal."³⁰

In a similar vein, Derek Kelly, in "The Logic of Black Philosophy," argues from the perspective of assumed philosophical universalism that since "the point of philosophical theorizing is simply to find some general regulative principles which form a foundation for rationality,"³¹ then there could be "no philosophy worth its name [e.g. Black philosophy] which is conditioned by contingent idiosyncrasies such as the color of a man's skin, or of his historical or geographical or social position."³² That is, if Black philosophy, through an assimilationist imaginary, does not imbibe Eurocentric epistemes and values—as its foundation of *rational inquiry*, it cannot be considered as a system of philosophy that is worth its name. The illogic of Kelly's argument consists in its contention that the only possibly relevant response to such a demand for the rational foundation of the philosophical enterprise, is that "[B]lack" people be recruited into philosophy, which once mastered, will bring the realization that there is no such

thing as “[B]lack” philosophy—just [B]lack men, among others, doing philosophy.”³³ The emphasis or allusion to *rationality* as a universal prism for philosophical investigation and experiential documentation, here, is unmistakable. The allusion to universalism here is akin to aping Eurocentric and western modes of thinking, with its humanist pretensions, disguised as a mode of studying the reality of Black experience in an undetached fashion. Again, this is a prototypical example of what Woodson refers to as epistemological masquerading—the problem of advocating Eurocentric, American, and other alien ideological modalities as the necessary grounds for underscoring the livity of Black people. This is the type of hegemonic system of thought that Woodson considers to be highly inimical to Black progress because its philosophical starting point does not prioritize the Black lived experience and does not take seriously, the thought systems produced by Black intellectuals.

Black Epistemology and the Derelictical Crisis of Africana/Black Philosophy

The derelictical crisis in Africana/Black philosophy is a crisis of knowledge. A knowledge crisis that is generated by intellectual commitments within Black philosophical scholarship that does not primarily center Black ideas and thought systems as the groundwork for representing Blackness or cataloging the Black experience. It should be stated that such approaches to Black philosophical scholarship that does not prioritize the intellectual productions or ideas of Black people as the groundwork for reasoning and thinking through the problems that confront Black people in the world have been criticized in current Africana philosophical scholarship. In this respect, Tommy J. Curry has been consistent in his critiques of such modes of paradigmatic considerations within the field of Africana/Black philosophy, that does not privilege Black people as the grounding for theorization and therefore, constitute an obstacle to the historiography of Black ideas and systems of thought. Curry refers to this problem as “the

derelictical crisis.” The derelictical crisis consists in the failure of African American philosophy “to inquire seriously into the culturally particular epistemologies of African-descended people, preferring instead to read into Black thought decidedly European philosophical continuities.”³⁴

Curry utilizes the term “epistemological convergence” to highlight this problematic. In his view,

epistemological convergence [is] the phenomenon by which Black cultural perspectives are only given the status of knowledge to the extent that they extend or reify currently maintained traditions of thought in European philosophy. Epistemic convergence maintains that what counts as knowledge is determined not to the extent that it accurately depicts the set of relations in the world but to the extent that it takes up an ideo-logical basis of the methodological perspective through which the world is to be studied.³⁵

In the quote above, Curry orients us towards grasping the racial normativity of the idea of humanism-universalism which cares more about the alignment of cultural worldviews as unformed epistemological systems rather than privileging the pluralism in cultural-epistemic perspectives. This idea of “normativity” is drawn from Eurocentric modalities as the acceptable matrix for codifying human experiences in the world. In this sense, epistemology becomes racialized and normalized as such. Thus, the derelictical crisis is twofold: epistemic convergence and the problem of racial normativity where the politics of knowledge seeks to decide the answer before the question is asked. It is a system that formulates ways of knowing and ways of characterizing what is known based on what fits into the humanistic and integrationist milieu set forth by the structure of “normativity.” The racial component of the idea of normativity as it pertains to knowledge acquisition, explains why it is quite difficult to make sense of the suggestion by some Black intellectuals that the Black lived experience should be subsumed into Eurocentric frames, under the guise of achieving universalism in the modes of thinking about Black people. Using such Eurocentric philosophical frames of knowledge schemes can lead to the erasure of Blacks from being considered as serious subjects of intellectual studies. As Itibaru,

M. Zulu affirms in a recent essay on the quagmire of interdisciplinary Black diaspora studies within the academia, disciplinarily alien modes of study or apparatus of imagination, imported into fields of inquiry that are supposed to be studying Black people as subjects, have led to the erasure of Blacks, by hegemonic actors from within such intellectual disciplines that claim to study black people, including the systematic epistemological posturing that projects Black people as unworthy subjects, undeserved of any serious intellectual deliberations.³⁶

This problematic also highlights the need for Black intellectual works that takes a detour from the epistemological imposition of western or Euro-American philosophical hegemony on thought systems related to people of African-descent within Africana philosophy and reinforce the need to focus the thrust of Black scholarship on Black people. As Molefi Kete Asante notes, the struggle for the disciplinary focus on Black people is not merely a struggle against the reactionary forces but the struggle for the advancement of such kinds of intellectual commitments.³⁷ Since the hegemonic knowledge regime that reifies traditions of thought in European philosophy is extraverted in its orientation, intellectual production and cultural-logic musings of Black people cannot obtain the status of a fully developed theory of knowledge of epistemology under such a system. Herein lies the relevance of the interventions proposed in this work; my work argues for the necessity of a discourse of Black Epistemologies, as a new sub-disciplinary focus under Africana Philosophy.

The term “Black Epistemologies” as used in this work, imagines a social epistemological apparatus that draws primarily from the thoughts of Black people, thinkers, scholars, or intellectuals, to characterize the spectrum of knowledge systems, thought patterns and culturalogical epistemological categories developed in a world that undervalue the intellectual contributions Black people have made to human civilization. It posits and divines that knowledge

is a site of power as well as a site for change or transformation. These are the two important Black epistemological axes that would be explored in this work—the *power of knowledge and knowledge of power* exhibited and explored by Black people both in diasporic contexts and in the new world, towards self-transformation and social change. Thus, the Black epistemological discourse embarked upon in this work, explores how Black people, on the one hand, mastered the *power of knowledge* in extreme conditions of racial, structural and intellectual oppression to attain self-transformation, through the mastery of personal epistemologies or self-knowledge, to ultimately achieve the humanization of Blackness.³⁸ On the other hand, it explores Black people’s demonstration of the *knowledge of power* as a heuristic tool to transform their social conditions or change their socio-political destinies in a world steeped in endemic doses of anti-Blackness.

The Black epistemological perspective explored in this work considers the discourse of *knowledge* as crucial to the question of *defining* the human; especially the connections between ascriptions of agency and epistemic power regarding how the knowing subject is characterized as the ground for shaping reality, truth and the world as we know it. In, “A Black Studies Manifesto,” Sylvia Wynter makes a case for the centrality of the discourse of knowledge in the envisioning of the future of Black studies. She argues that because the question of knowledge occupies a central place in the definition of what it means to be human, Black studies or Black philosophy needs to focus on the discourse of knowledge to undo the dehumanization of Blackness in hegemonic discourses of knowledge. Wynter specifically argues that “a black studies hypothesis [which] redefines the human in the following terms: that although *being* human is implemented by the physiological processes of the body—how else?—being human is not itself a property of the narratively instituted governing codes of symbolic *life* and *death* or

sociogenic principle enacting of our human forms of life as a third level of hybrid *bios* and *logos* existence. *Being human* can therefore not pre-exist the cultural systems and institutional mechanisms, including the institution of knowledge, by means of which we are socialized *to be human*.”³⁹

Wynter’s arguments highlight the importance of positioning the epistemological commitments within Africana/Black philosophy towards humanizing Blackness. In other words, taking the thoughts and intellectual contributions of Black folks seriously as epistemological constructs have the potential of undercutting the hegemonic, cultural, and institutional structures while moving the discourse of knowledge towards the humanization of Blackness. This explains why Jason R. Ambrose and Sabine Broeck, in their recently published anthology entitled, *Black Knowledges/Black Struggles: Essays in Critical Epistemology* makes the case for urgent development of a discourse of Black knowledge that transcends the present order of knowing acquiescent to the reification of the western memory or imaginary—a sort of epistemic disloyalty to the present otherization of knowledge. They insist that this should organically germinate out a “mutually reinforcing, necessarily conflictual, and at times contradictory process of fashioning an epistemic disloyalty to a Western “memory”—and emancipation from its fictively-constructed and overall structurally-imposed *desêtre* non-being status on Black peoples globally—emerged a formidable tradition or strain of “Black” epistemic work.”⁴⁰

The discourse of knowledge within the mainstream theory of knowledge or epistemology (the present order of knowledge in the Euro-American praxis), have mostly not taken Black epistemic work and Black thought, as well as Black agency seriously. The mechanisms of epistemic discourse within this hegemonic framework, projects epistemological issues and problems as that which primarily concerns, the analysis of knowledge, questions concerning

epistemic agency or doxastic epistemic features, collective mentality, and epistemic authority within a limited-western or Eurocentric individualistic understanding of knowledge and epistemology. These issues are mostly codified and rendered through the de-bodied articulation of such issues or problems of knowledge; which largely leads to the erasure of Blackness. This is what Joseph Scheurich and Michelle D. Young describe as the problem of *coloring epistemologies* which refers to the epistemologies in the mainstream discourse that offer racially biased ways of knowing including ways of describing how to utilize knowledge to live in the world.⁴¹ Similarly, in her article concerning the role of race and dominance in knowledge production, Shana Almeida argues that a critical appraisal of the present order of knowledge will show how its Eurocentric posture and colonial hegemony, is primarily geared towards (re)producing “legitimate” knowledge and knowers in the western world.⁴²

This sentiment is also echoed by Sylvia Wynter when she opines that “our present order of knowledge and the cultural messages which its social knowledge disciplines (of Humanities and Social Sciences, [and philosophy]) convey, the signaling systems by means of which our behaviors as contemporary Westernized and bourgeoisified humans (i.e., as Man), are lawfully elaborated according to rules of which we have been hitherto non-conscious, of which our present order of knowledge can give us no knowledge.”⁴³ Our present order of knowledge can give us no knowledge because its “domain of inquiry is precisely that of the social reality of our present Western world-system that its nation-state sub-units, have themselves to be lawfully and rigorously elaborated in terms governed by the imperative of enabling the stable replication of our contemporary autopoietic and sociogenically encoded, Western-bourgeois world system.”⁴⁴ This work aims to address the anomalies identified in the present order of knowledge in regards to the erasure of Blackness (non-representation of Blackness in the domain of knowledge), by

advocating the need for a sub-disciplinary focus, namely, the discourse of Black epistemologies within Africana philosophy that will seriously take into consideration the intellectual contributions of Black people, their knowledge production and the evolution of epistemic tools for navigating the world.

The derelictical crisis includes the politics of knowledge, that inform the allotting of epistemological status to subjects within the present order of knowledge, which tends to frame Black subjects as victims rather than progenitors of knowledge. In *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South*, Boaventura de Sousa Santos describes this crisis of knowledge as a situation whereby, “[d]ominant politics becomes epistemological when it is able to make a credible claim that the only valid knowledge available is the one that ratifies its own dominance.”⁴⁵ This attestation to white subjects as credible sources of knowledge is well pronounced in Miranda Fricker’s popular book entitled, *Epistemic Injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing*. In this text, Fricker explores the social context of knowledge generation and distribution in such a way that Black subjects were represented as victims but not as progenitors of knowledge—in lieu of calling out systems of epistemic injustices and oppressive knowledge practices. Although she maintains that her focus is on “epistemic practices as they are, [and] of necessity, played out by subjects that are socially situated.”⁴⁶ Black people were only included in the discussion of the intersections of power and the ethics of knowing as “victims” of systems of epistemic injustice (broadly construed as testimonial and hermeneutic injustices). Although Fricker’s work emphasizes the discriminatory epistemic practices that emanate from different social contexts, including the systems of epistemic injustice or wrongs individuals suffers in their capacity as the subject of knowledge which is essential to their human value, she locates Black subjects in the position she regards as

having a “credibility deficit” without necessarily interrogating the deeper implications of such epistemic assumptions concerning the Black subject.⁴⁷

Fricker’s notion of the Black subject as an epistemic subject suffering from “credibility deficit” was drawn from her analysis of certain aspects of Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which she utilized to frame Black people (or “Negroes” as she colloquially cites), as epistemic subjects suffering from deeply rooted anti-black racist prejudicial attributions of epistemic worthiness primarily in relation to the “dominant” and authorial white subject. Without paying any critical attention to the signification of the racist section from Harper’s Lee’s work; she rehearses a courtroom scene in the fictional text where a young Black man named Tom Robinson, who was falsely accused of a crime he didn’t commit, was brought to trial. From this scenario, Fricker concludes that “[t]he trial proceedings enact what is in one sense a straightforward struggle between the power of evidence and the power of racial prejudice.”⁴⁸ However, there are certain faulty assumptions inherent in this conclusion that Fricker draws from the court scene. The first has to do with Fricker’s assumption or imagination that Robinson was even considered a human (talk less of an epistemic agent) within the social context of Jim Crow America and the extreme ways in which Black humanity was undermined under such anti-black systems of oppression.⁴⁹ The historical reality of Black suffering, especially the erasure of Black humanity through violent death (lynchings) that were imposed on Black people during this period, by the white community, which is not reflected in Fricker’s conclusion. This assumption on the part of Fricker consists in the idea that there is an “intuitive relationship between racial oppression and the character (trustworthiness, truthful, etc.) attributed to the members of racial groups.”⁵⁰

The second concerns other dimensions of discrimination which the scene in question suggests, such as anti-Black misogyny, is absent in the analysis of Fricker's text.⁵¹ That is, the fact that Robinson is Black and male makes him an easy target for being molded into any fantasies that the white court imagines him to be—a malleable epistemic agent that takes on whatever negative stereotypes is projected unto him. Thus, both of these assumptions that Fricker draws from her reading of Harper's text, are deeply problematic in an epistemological sense. It fails to account for the undermining of Black agency that makes it impossible for the systems of structural racism embedded in white institutions of power, such as the court, to recognize the humanity and epistemic agency of Robinson, who symbolizes Black folks in the text. Fricker also ignores the problem of Black male vulnerability that is present in the analysis of the case of Robinson that she draws upon in her text. Robinson was primarily targeted for being a Black male; he was believed to be guilty of a crime he did not commit because the mere perception of criminalization projected unto Black males is enough to get them convicted or killed. Which makes the question of epistemic failure based on prejudice that Fricker highlights irrelevant in this specific context.

This type of negative ascription of victimhood to Black subjects, present in current canonized epistemological scholarship, is what I like to refer to as “victim-hood epistemologies.” This phenomenon is also visible in the works produced by scholars like Kristie Dotson and José Medina. Dotson, for instance, in “Accumulating Epistemic Power,” explores epistemological imperatives that pertain to the death of Black people. Although, in this work, she highlights “centering orienting variables that facilitate resilient oblivion about the devaluation of a particular Black person's death at the hands of state actors.”⁵² It is still an epistemological consideration that focuses on Black subjects as victims rather than progenitors of knowledge. In

a similar vein, in “Toward a Foucaultian Epistemology of Resistance,” Medina discusses Black subjects as suffering from credibility deficit (just like Fricker), and the silencing of Black voices within the space of reasons. He highlights, all kinds of mechanisms in white epistemic practices that have contributed to maintaining the repudiation and blocking of Black subjectivities from giving testimony and exercising an epistemic assumption against its credibility. While exploring multiple venues of epistemic interaction in the white world, from the streets of white suburbs to the lecture halls of the academy, through which Black voices have been traditionally minimized and heavily constrained in their ability to speak about their own experiences.⁵³ What the works by Fricker, Dotson, and Medina have in common here is the negative standpoint from which Black epistemic subjects are characterized or studied—from the standpoint of victimhood epistemologies. However, such epistemological works that study Black people from the place of deficit-epistemologies are antithetical to the goal of humanizing Blackness through the discourse of Black cultural, self-expressive epistemologies that is of concern in this work.

This research work moves away from such intellectual projects that negatively portray Blackness from a place of epistemological deficit because it does not consider Black subjects as primary epistemic agents but as secondary epistemic agents—object with effect—only in white schemas. The story of Blackness cannot merely be the story of deficiencies, insufficiency, and death. It cannot also be a story of dependency—epistemological decency which may reinforce the stereotype that Blacks can only think using the “masters” tools. This work takes a detour from such negative approaches to the study of Blackness in an anti-Black world, by exploring the historical intellectual antecedents of Black folks, while presenting a nuanced discussion of the unique postulations of knowledge and systems of thought that they contributed to their racial uplift and human civilization. The fact of history shows that Black intellectuals have been

progenitors of knowledge, epistemologists in every sense of the word, although their written reflections on the nature of knowledge and the use of knowledge to promote human understanding, self and social transformation, as well as the use of knowledge to break the chains of enslavement, racialized violence, and ignorance, have not been adequately characterized in contemporary Africana/Black scholarship. Thus, a historical account of Black epistemological thought is crucial to the vision of humanizing Blackness which is imagined in this work.

Unbounding Black Genius: A Historiography of Black Epistemology

It is often thought by contemporary Black philosophers that epistemology, and the criteria for assessing not only what is knowledge, but who can produce knowledge is a political question originating in the radicalism of the mid-20th century. The scholarly efforts aimed at grappling with this political question of knowledge or knowing, during this period, have been able to reveal that Black intellectuals have focused on the considerations of knowledge right from the 17th century, especially at a time when many Blacks were legally prevented or banned from reading, learning, or writing. A little care to history shows however that Black thinkers have devoted considerable time and effort to how Black people understand, know, and assess what is true about the world, and they have come to know these truths. Especially, traversing the difficulties of living in a dehumanizing world, while devising various epistemological apparatus to achieve great feats of learning. Such accomplishment does not only speak to the resilient spirit that Black people possess to survive slavery and its attendant extreme forms of violence, but it also speaks of Black genius—the unrelenting quest to understand the world and Black people’s place within it, based on epistemological principles that were authentically developed.

Between mid-17th and mid-20th centuries, Black thinkers wrote philosophical treatises aimed at chronicling Black genius and narrating how Black people were able to prevail, in a

world that gave them no chance of survival, based on the science of learning, much less imagined their intellectual thriving. Examples of such works are Benjamin Brawley's *The Negro Genius: A New Appraisal of the Achievement of the American Negro in Literature and the Fine Arts* and Edgar Toppin's *A Biographical History of Blacks in America, since 1528*.⁵⁴ While, Brawley's work focuses on the subtleties of Black genius expressed in the field of arts or aesthetics; Toppin's work documents the broad areas where Black folks thrived through significant knowledge contributions, such as in scientific inventions, philosophical ruminations on the nature of truth and life, education, and accomplishments in the United States military. In this work, Toppin emphasized the talents of Black folks and he also documents how even in great conditions of deprivations, disenfranchisement, and discrimination, Black people prevailed through the erection of various knowledge schemes.⁵⁵ Another example is Edward A. Johnson's treatise titled *A School History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1890* published in 1894, which traced the historical foundation of "all the science learning" and knowledge to Blacks (often erroneously ascribed to European thinkers in Greece). Thus, the appellation coined by Johnson, "[a]ll the science and learning" was at once a boast about the intellectual accomplishments of Black America's African ancestors and a reminder to readers about the variety of intellectual and cultural influences that Black people bequeathed to the world.⁵⁶

Significantly, Johnson insisted that African people had once aspired to, and achieved, great feats of learning and understanding and have systems for the trans-generational transfer of such knowledge schemes until the white colonialists and human kidnappers showed up on the shores of Africa. The incidence of colonial and imperialistic exploitation of Africans through the enterprise of trans-Atlantic slave trade truncated these intellectual legacies and great accomplishments in learning and understanding. This is why Johnson would later opine that if

future generations of Black American scientists, scholars, and leaders were to rise from the ash heap of slavery and the subsequent violence and economic marginalization that followed under the system of Jim Crow segregation in the South and West, African American school children would need to engage with a life of the mind by first recognizing that their African ancestors—no matter how distant—had once overcome great odds in contributing to the civilized world’s store of knowledge and understanding.⁵⁷ We see from these Black historical and intellectual works cited here that Black thinkers have explored issues concerning the relationship between knowledge and human progress and the development of the mind. Even though, the predominant characterization of Black folks, during the period when these scholars were writing, was that of an inferior race that has no potential for intellectual productivity.

It is in this regard that George W. Williams’s *History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880* is considered as a Black epistemological project that aims to correct the caricatured portrayal of Black people within the throes of American history and the erasure of Black contribution to American history and civilization. He writes thus:

I have tracked my bleeding countrymen through the widely scattered documents of American history; I have listened to their groans, their clanking chains, and melting prayers until the woes of a race and the agonies of centuries seem to crowd upon my soul as a bitter reality. Many pages of history have been blistered with my tears; and although having lived but a little more than a generation, my mind feels as if it cycled old...The long spectral hand on the clock of American history points to the completion of the second decade since the American slave became an American citizen. How wonderous have been his strides, how marvelous his achievements!⁵⁸

What is evident from the assertions that Williams makes in the above quotation is that although Black folks have suffered tremendously under the weight of white enslavement and asinine discrimination, their achievements or accomplishment is a testament to their genius and the ultimate negation of the stereotypical myth of the inferiority of the Black race. William would go on to express his principal aim in writing this text as engendered by the decision to “strive to lift

the Negro [Black] race to its pedestal in American history [and to] raise this post to indicate the progress of [their] humanity; to instruct the present, and to inform the future.⁵⁹

Williams Wells Brown in his *magnum opus*, *The Black Man, His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements*, presents a more forceful opposition to the characterization of the Black race as an inferior race, by arguing that one of the reasons why the knowledge contributions of Black folks are not considered as important scholarly contributions has to do with the perpetuation of this unfounded myth of “Black inferiority.” According to Brown:

The calumniators and traducers of the Negro [Black race] are to be found, mainly, among two classes. The first and most relentless are those who have done them the greatest injury, by being instrumental in their enslavement and consequent degradation. They delight to descent upon the “natural inferiority” of the blacks and claim that we were destined only for a servile condition, entitled neither to liberty nor the legitimate pursuit of happiness. The second class are those who are ignorant of the characteristics of the race and are the mere echoes of the first. To meet and refute these misrepresentations, and to supply a deficiency, long felt in the community, of a work containing sketches of individuals who, by their own genius, capacity, and intellectual development, have surmounted the many obstacles which slavery and prejudice have thrown in their way, and raised themselves to positions of honor and influence, this volume was written.⁶⁰

Brown was very clear about filling in the erased historical antecedents and achievements of the Black race in terms of knowledge and invention which explains why he provides the emphasis on Black genius as the justification for this treatise. The logic of Brown’s arguments is that the emphasis on the natural genius of Blacks, which has been systematically erased from historical and contemporaneous narratives, is a refutation of the mythic doctrine of the inferiority of the Black race.

Thus, Brown traces the historical roots of Black epistemological contributions to human civilization back to Ethiopia and Egypt—pre-European contact with Africa. Brown, argued for example, that Ethiopians and Egyptians who were Black, in the earliest periods of history, had attained a high degree of civilization through their mastery of science and learning, and they

were able to use such knowledge to construct great architectural edifices and wonderful monuments, some of which still exists to attest to the power and skill of the ancient Ethiopians and Egyptians.⁶¹ For him, The Black race has not always been considered the inferior race. The time was when he stood at the head of science and literature.⁶² This time, referred to here is in the earliest periods of history, where the Ethiopians had attained a high degree of civilization, and where there is every reason to believe that the learning and science derived from them must be ascribed to those wonderful monuments which still exist to attest the power and skill of the ancient Egyptians.⁶³ Following in this line of argument, Brown concludes that Black people have “that intellectual genius which God has planted in the mind of man, that distinguishes him from the rest of creation, and which needs only cultivation to make it bring forth fruit.”⁶⁴ In the review of William Wells Brown’s *The Black Man*, Marnie Hughes-Warrington, in “Coloring Universal History: Robert Benjamin’s Lewis’s ‘Light and Truth’ (1843) and William Wells Brown’s *The Black Man*’ (1863),” avows that the general aim of the author was to empower his readers with knowledge, for without it, he writes, we should be an ignorant, superstitious and degraded race; since the most learned men of all nations have obtained their information, skill, and science from books and historical works, he urges his readers to remember that knowledge is power, and if they have more knowledge, they are wiser than their neighbor and have power over him which he cannot resist.⁶⁵

In a similar vein, Rayford W. Logan, in *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901* commented on the making of the myth of Black inferiority within the white imaginary from an epistemological angle. He argues that such a myth was projected unto Black folks to relegate them to the realm of the “unknown” or the realm of the “unknowing Being.” A power-construction that performs the dual malevolent function of “justifying” slavery on the one

hand and “justifying” white superiority complex on the other hand with its attended social, political, economic, and psychological wages. In Logan’s view, virtually every derogatory stereotype was affixed upon the Black race, within white epistemic imaginary frames.⁶⁶ Such that the dominant epistemological narratives about Black people, in various articles, stories, anecdotes, poems and cartoons, Black people were made to appear superstitious, dull and stupid, imitative and hence not creative, ignorant, suspicious, happy-go-lucky, improvident, lazy, immoral, criminal; he was depicted as a liar, a thief, and a drunkard.⁶⁷ These negative ways of caricaturing Black people are mainly pathologies—pathologies projected on Blacks as a problem, but in reality, is a problem of white perception which is not based on reality. As Howard Brotz, notes in his edited anthology entitled, *African-American Social and Political Thought, 1850-1920*, the fundamental thesis of Black pathology that encapsulates the existence of the Blacks as a social entity was due to the perception of whites. Whites perceived Blacks as “other.” That perception of “otherness” was inseparable from a judgment of inferiority. But there was no reason for Blacks to exist. Blacks in his view were simply “exaggerated Americans.” That meant that they had no naturally inward attachments or bonds to each other, in families, churches, social institutions. Any sentiment of race consciousness was but the effect of an external cause, that is, the perception imposed upon them by whites as “other.”⁶⁸

It is important to state that Black thinkers have not merely been responding to these pathological narratives, and caricatures masqueraded as “social truths;” they have been more interested in showing aspects of the Black lived experience that emphasizes the dimensions of knowledge and learning, which are crucial in the project of racial uplift. In this respect, the Black church is one institution that has been credited in Black historical writings for its significant contributions to such a project. In *The Negro in American Life and Thought*, Logan also reports,

concerning the status of Blacks in America in Post-Reconstruction, that the Black church served as an institutional platform for the purveying of Black epistemologies which significantly improved the professional and personal lives of Black people. Just as segregation has promoted the growth of the Black press and the Black church, similarly it accounted for the development of Black business and professional men.⁶⁹ The firmest foundation for Black progress, as influenced by the church, was more clearly seen than any other, namely, the remarkable increase in literacy. That very advance, from 18.6% in 1870 to 55.5% in 1890, may have been one reason for the introduction of the “understanding” clause in the new constitutional amendments designed to disenfranchise Blacks.⁷⁰ Also, Carter G. Woodson’s *The History of the Negro Church* provides a comprehensive historiography that documents the importance of the Black church (as a social force) in the life of the Negro [Blacks] around this period. In his estimation, before emancipation the church was the only institution which the Negro [Blacks], in a few places in the South and throughout the North, was permitted to maintain for his own peculiar needs. Since it offers the only avenue for the expressional activities of the race, the church answered many a social purpose for which this institution among other groups differently circumstanced had never before been required to serve. The Black church became a place of enlightenment and an avenue for the dissemination of information from the better informed, by actual teachings in the Sunday school. This educational platform—the Sunday school—served often as an outlet for expression of the Negro [Black] social mind, which initiated a renewed determination to break their chains through prayer, and through concerted action on the basis that persons who want to be free must themselves, first strike the blow.⁷¹

Black women also made significant historical contributions to social epistemological and political schemes that brought about the progress of the Black race. During the period that

Rayford Logan deemed the “nadir of black life,” the formative years for Black intellectuals in William Banks’s estimation, Black women were widely and often systematically excluded from participating in mainstream U.S. and African American academic culture.⁷² Which explains why the voices of Black women, in terms of their contributions to knowledge, are not popularly accounted for in discourses on Black contributions to the civil rights movement through the ages. Whereas, the turn of the century saw a new level of activism among Black women, who organized to the National Association of Colored Women to defend themselves and their race against unjust and unholy charges. One Black activist of that period, journalist and novelist Pauline E. Hopkins, even undertook an ethnological defense of Black people.

For instance, a review of the origins and history of the races, her *Primer of Facts Pertaining to the Early Greatness of the African Race, and the Possibility of Restoration by its Descendants... Compiled and Arranged from the works of the best-known Ethnologists and Historians*, rehearsed arguments long traditional to Black ethnology.⁷³ Hopkins's historical approach as an editor and journalist for the *Colored American Magazine* was essentially pragmatic. She strove to translate “representative lives into authentic history” and compose “history from exemplary lives in the hope of elevating the image of the entire race.” Seeking to inspire her readers to uplift themselves and the more unfortunate of their race, Hopkins translated two dozen biographical sketches of “famous” Black historical figures into participatory exemplary texts, to inspire and provide epistemic frames for Black people to imagine a brighter future beyond the condition of servitude and destitution.⁷⁴ In her essay on “African American Church Women,” Genna Rae McNell explores how African American women also worked within the institution of the church or “their [religious and secular] organizations” to promote the idea of Blacks as knowledgeable humans and how to promote the status of the Black race.

McNell argues that African American women, “motivated by deep religious convictions,” and in the inter-church movement to address basic issues of human rights and to create strategies to improve the economic, social, and political status of females, [B]lacks, and other minorities.”⁷⁵ This implies that Black institutions also serves as a veritable source for the espousal of Black social and political epistemologies as a mechanism for social change.

These Black historical works reveal that Black intellectuals have been concerned with epistemological questions or schemes and their application to the Black condition in a world that is set up to perpetually negate Black humanity and relegate the Black race to the dustbin of history. The historical works alluded to, in this section, shows that actual Black epistemological thinking about the world predates this debate on disciplinarity. In this work, I contend that it is only when we can look at the actual writings, reflections, or philosophical ruminations of Black folks, that we can fully and deeply appreciate the gamut of epistemological contributions they made to human progress. As Patricia A. Young who argues in “Roads to Travel: A Historical Look at The Freedman’s Torchlight—An African American Contribution to 19th Century Instructional Technologies,” African Americans have been active producers of knowledge throughout the history of the United States; however, during most of this history, their role in such capacities has been ignored, lost, destroyed, excluded, omitted, sporadically documented.⁷⁶ Thus, this work is an attempt to humanize Blackness by engaging with the ways by which Black intellectual contributions, in terms of the production of knowledge to facilitate human/Black progress are diminished in contemporary scholarship. It explores works within the Black intellectual tradition, which contain rich sources, though abundantly untapped, as a philosophical grounding for envisioning a sub-disciplinary area of research within Africana philosophy,

namely, Black epistemologies. Among the strengths of this work is its foundational epistemology: it takes the experience of the African-American people as its starting point.⁷⁷

Humanizing Blackness: Beyond the Deficit-Epistemological Portraiture of the Black Experience

I wrote because words were my weapons to resist, to affirm [B]lack humanity, and to defend it.

—James Cone, 2011

This work advances an epistemological mode of studying Black people that upholds a humanizing vision of Blackness such that the intellectual productions, knowledge, and thought systems of Black people are taken seriously and considered as foundational principles or social epistememes for navigating the world. In a world where Blackness is thought to be laced with endemic backwardness and human deficiencies, this work becomes crucial in its insistence that the epistemological schemes and principles developed by Black thinkers constitute a veritable resource for forging a humanizing vision of Blackness in an anti-black world. It takes a departure from current trends or orientations in Africana philosophical scholarship, anti-racist studies, and Black studies that seek to limit Black intellectual production to mere critiques of hegemonic knowledge-systems including systems of structural oppression and anti-Black racism. For instance, in “African-American Philosophy: Through the lens of Socio-existential Struggle,” George Yancy describes Black philosophical thought as a critical process of rendering the struggle against Euro-essentialist modes of thought that renders such thought unintelligible.⁷⁸ Yancy’s emphasis on the struggle as the task of Africana philosophy was drawn from his reading of Leonard Harris’ classical and important text, *Philosophy Born of Struggle: Anthology of Afro-American Philosophy from 1917* which among other things, shaped the canon of Black philosophical scholarship. Yancy, following Harris, insists that by the very nature of its

ideological preoccupation and the context of its formulation, “African-American philosophy is dominated by issues of practicality and struggle.”⁷⁹ This characterization of Harris’ canonical text is simplistic, to say the least. Apart from the fact that Harris’s canonical text was one of the most definitive publications in the late twentieth century, in regard to the nomenclature “Black or Afro-American philosophy,” its content and context of discourse go far beyond the mere emphasis on Black intellectual struggles or critiques. As Harris himself notes, in his contribution to this anthology, entitled “Select Bibliography of Afro-American works in Philosophy,” the intent of the compilation in this text, focuses primarily on “the wealth of philosophic material by Afro-Americans.”⁸⁰

Other Black scholars have towed a similar path as Yancy to reduce the engagement in Black philosophical scholarship to that which emphasizes and essentializes the struggles and travails of Black people in an anti-Black world which necessitates the intellectual production of critiques against hegemonic scholarship and colonial intellectual formations within the dominant culture. This is the kind of view that is voiced in R.D.G. Kelly’s essay entitled, “Philosophy and Black Liberation.” In this work, Kelly defends the view that the thrust of Africana philosophy or what he describes as the philosophy born of struggle, is an attempt “to analyze and reflect upon the real and peculiar, historically conditioned position of Black people in American society. The struggle between idealism and materialism is confronted head-on, as well as varying approaches to ontology, epistemology, hermeneutics, ethics, phenomenology, etc. Afro-American philosophy is philosophy only in so far as it is an analysis by African-Americans of their status, conditions, and life in a racist society.”⁸¹

While it is apt to think of Africana philosophy as that which pertains to the lived experience of Black people in an anti-Black world, this should not amount to reducing the gamut

of Black scholarship to a mere descriptive project of divining the “struggle between idealism and materialism.” Christina Sharpe’s reflections in *In the Wake of Blackness and Being* depicts a deficit-epistemological model of studying Black people as well.⁸² She considers standpoint epistemology as an epistemic axis that is always in contention with anti-Blackness such that the grounds from which Black people tend to speak about concepts like “self-affirmation,” “self-identity,” and “self-avowal,” is already from a place of negation given the reality of state-sanctioned violence already mapped or projected unto Black bodies. This fits into the negative ascriptions of Blackness described in Owen Dwyerl and John Jones’s “White Socio-spatial epistemology,” where Blackness is described as the disfigured entity, an unruly norm against which deprived whites are marked by white institutional frames as dangerous and disordered.⁸³ Similarly, Debra J. Dickerson, in *The End of Blackness* under a false sense of disciplinary universalism, argues from a deficit-epistemological standpoint that “Blacks must accept that they are numerical and political minority and must master the dominant bodies of knowledge even as they fight for the inclusion of worthy black knowledge.”⁸⁴

In a related fashion, Stephen Ferguson II in his book chapter documenting his reflections on the condition of Blackness and epistemology, provocatively sub-titled as “[t]he Death of Epistemology in African American Studies”⁸⁵ is nothing but an undisguised denial of Afrocentric [Black-centered] ways of looking at the world in favor of a more Eurocentric and alien way of looking at the world and describing the place of Blackness within such a world that Fanon refers to as the Manichean world. For Fanon, the Eurocentric-Manichean world is that which is steeped in unreason, illogicality, and a world replete with varying forms of epistemic violence disguised as objectivity, truth, normative, and the ideal. Ferguson II argues (albeit erroneously), that the Afrocentric notion regarding a Black epistemology and science has to be rejected.” His rationale

for this position lies in his Eurocentric and hegemonic conceptualization that any form(s) of knowledge that characterizes a people's experience must attain the criterion of "objectivity" and "scientific truth." However, Ferguson fails to subject the sources of his assumptions about the notions of "objectivity" and "scientific truth" to critical assessment.

He primarily derived these notions from the philosophy of Karl Marx. In a section of his work, where he strongly criticizes Afrocentricity as value-free science, Ferguson unmistakably articulates why he finds Marx/Marxism attractive. As he puts it, "[t]he unity of science and ideology, for Marx, is grounded in an ideology's capacity to approximate objective material reality correctly."⁸⁶ We can raise the following critical questions regarding the assumptions that Ferguson II, makes in regards to a Marxist interpretation of the notion of objectivity and the Black experience. Why should Karl Marx be the epistemological grounding for cataloging the Black experience? Ferguson II does not provide a rationale for privileging such Eurocentric philosophy as the theoretical prism for articulating the Black experience. However, one can also flip the question around and ask whether the thoughts of Black intellectual stalwarts like Alexander Crummell, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Martin R. Delaney, can constitute the epistemological grounding for the "objective" articulation and expression of the epistemological worldview for all Europeans. This clearly shows Ferguson's acquiescence to hegemonic scholarship and Eurocentric dogma, disguised as "critique." In my view, this type of trite scholarship does not help to humanize Blackness—it in fact, dehumanizes Blackness through the subjugation and substitution of how Black people have cataloged their own experiences into alien interpretive frames like those of Marx, as suggested by Ferguson II.

Following the pedestrian vision within the academy that considers most critical voices of structures of power, and oppressive practices, including pernicious scholarship, as offering

“critical analysis” of the status quo, or the hegemonic center; some sociologists of knowledge and social epistemologists have flippantly reduced the rigor of Black scholarship to mere “analysis.” The emphasis on the “analysis” of the harrowing and dehumanizing conditions of Black folks, in the new world, has led some sociologists of knowledge like Joe Feagin to characterize Black thinkers, in a reductionist fashion, not as creators or producers of knowledge but as “activists,” “critics,” or “analysts.” For instance, In *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations*, Feagin describes Black intellectuals such as Fredrick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and Kwame Ture as activists.⁸⁷ It is quite interesting to note that he sees Black people not as creators of knowledge but as thinkers whose main focus was on critiquing the flaws and racism within western civilization. Feagin essentially offers a narrative that erroneously characterizes Black thinkers as merely interested in pointing out the problems and contradictions of white civilization, which undermines the larger commitment to Black self-development and social development that overwhelmingly concern the intellectual commitments of these Black thinkers.

In this same text, Feagin goes on to argue that one of the “gifts” of Black folks to white/western civilization is the development of the *critique of institutional racism*; this institutional racism viewpoint mostly stems from a long line of African American scholars and activists, going back centuries, where thinker-activists like Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. Du Bois long ago were able to put white society and its societal institutions at the center of critical analysis of white racism.⁸⁸ Feagin’s characterization of Black thinkers as “activists” intimates an intellectual subterfuge that depicts Black people as the moral conscience or compass of the white race. A good historical understanding of the life and times of Black scholars like Fredrick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and Kwame Ture, that

Feagin mentions in his text, would reveal that his reductionist characterization undermines certain aspects of the Black experience of the virulent forces of white racism. It also does not take into consideration the plethora of scholarship that these Black thinkers produced that goes beyond mere “critiques” and “analyses of white people’s moral/racist flaws; especially the aspects of their intellectual works that are primarily focused on improving the lived experience of Black people. Even within Black intellectual works that are promoted as offering *New Perspectives on the Black Intellectual Tradition*, Black thinkers and scholars are described, in an essentialist fashion as “activists.”⁸⁹

Similarly, in *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*, Jose Medina discusses the criteria or condition for knowledge, with an idea of resistance subjectivity. As he describes it:

Resistant subjects are active subjects, subjects who exert resistance. What are the responsibilities of a resistant subjectivity? And do all subjects have an obligation to resist? One of the most central theses of this book will be that those who live under conditions of oppression—however they happen to inhabit contexts of domination (as victim, as oppressor, as a bystander, as both victim and oppressor, etc.)—have an obligation to resist. And when it comes to epistemic oppression, this obligation to resist leads to many epistemic duties: to fight against ignorance, to know oneself and others in certain respects to learn and to facilitate the learning of others, to resist epistemic vices and to work toward epistemic virtues, to meliorate epistemic habits and attitudes, and in short, to collaborate in the pursuit of epistemic justice.⁹⁰

Within this analytical frame of reference designed by Medina, a Black subject would only be able to achieve some epistemic justice or attain some kind of epistemic virtue if and only if they are embroiled in some perpetual mix of struggle within everyday praxis. There is a negative orientation attached to this conceptualization of resistant subjects such that Black subjects cannot be imagined as creators of knowledge but as those struggling to be perceived as “worthy” epistemic agents. The limitation of knowledge ascription or production to the axis of a struggle

between the oppressed and the oppressor suggests a loop that does not mirror other possible considerations of knowledge production that does not within this scheme of reference.

In more recent publications, such as Amir Jaima's "Africana Philosophy as Prolegomenon to Any Future American Philosophy" we see an attempt to engage with the problem of the minimization of the relevance of Black philosophical scholarship within the present order of hegemonic knowledge, known as "American philosophy." In this essay, Jaima pursues a positive project, arguing that since the enterprise of American philosophy has reached a standard of achievement in terms of concretizing its whiteness, which he conceives as both an epistemological and ontological achievement that "must be appreciated," the only way forward for this brand of philosophy, "entails an Africana philosophical critique, which consists of two methodological ventures—one deconstructive and the other radical."⁹¹ While this suggestion is commendable, it is difficult to imagine how it will substantially change the nature of the American philosophy edifice which characterizes whiteness as an ontological and epistemological achievement, that other non-white philosophical systems should deploy as a lens for viewing the world.

At best, one can consider such a proposal for an Africana philosophical critique within American philosophy as that which may bring about limited outcomes because it will largely depend on whether American philosophy will be receptive of such critiques (voiced by Blacks whose voices are raced and devalued) as well as whether such critiques will be taken seriously. A skeptic may argue that this position is deeply problematic if we consider American philosophy as a racist enterprise, take for instance, the thoughts of Josiah Royce, the American philosopher who was an ardent supporter of British colonization, an adamant racist, and an advocate of American imperialism. His proposal to colonize Black Americans in the South is an extension of

this logic and is especially relevant to how one theorizes his idea of community and the consequence of such ideas on racialized groups like Black Americans today.⁹² At best, one can imagine a world where American philosophy accepts the critical interventions of Africana philosophy, in a limited but not holistic fashion. However, this highlights the importance of the idea of humanization of Blackness, advanced in this work, which focuses on the knowledge schemes or epistemic categories created by Black people within the Black intellectual tradition.

Knowing while Black: Exploring Two Epistemological Categories in Africana Philosophy

Most recent anthologies produced under titles such as Africana, African-American or Black philosophy, tend to explore broad areas of philosophical inquiry that focuses on the ideas, thoughts, and writings of Black people. However, one obvious shortcoming of these collaborative intellectual productions, is that it fails to explore Black intellectual thoughts under the rubric of Black epistemology. For instance, the edited volume by Tommy J. Lott and John P. Pittman, titled, *A Companion to African-American Philosophy*, covers sub-disciplinary concentrations such as Africa and diasporic thought, Race/Racism and gender, legal and socio-political philosophy, and aesthetics and cultural values, there was no mention of Black epistemologies. Also, James Montmarquet and William Hardy's edited volume titled, *Reflections: African-American Philosophy*, though expansive in its approach—drawing from a long list of Black intellectual works—both historical and contemporaneous writings, does not have any selected readings or writings under the heading of Black epistemologies. Although this anthology includes such sub-disciplinary areas of inquiry, such as Black moral and political philosophy, ethics and value theory, among others. There are other anthologies like John P. Pittman's *African-American Perspectives and Philosophical Traditions*, Fred Lee Hord and Jonathan Scott Lee's *I am Because We Are: Readings in Black Philosophy*, and Charles A.

Frye's *Level Three: A Black Philosophy Reader*, among many others. While these anthologies explore issues of interest such as the role of philosophy in Black studies, issues concerning racism, identity and social life, and plural orientations in Africana, African-American or Black philosophy, including selected readings from the writings of notable scholars in the field, such as Cornel West, Lucius Outlaw, Angela Y. Davis, and those from Black historical figures like Fredrick Douglass, Anna Julia Cooper, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, to mention a few; they make no mention of Black epistemologies as a philosophical construct that has developed through the ages within the Black intellectual tradition.

My work aims to fill this void in Africana philosophical scholarship by making a case for a sub-disciplinary inquiry that focuses primarily on Black epistemologies. To this end, this work seeks to engage with the following research questions: what are the categories of epistemological thought that are embedded in Black philosophical works produced within the Black intellectual tradition? What does it mean to study and engage with Black thought on its merit, without alluding to alien categories? Thus, this work maintains that African descended or Black people cannot be defined only by their oppression, struggle, and resistance to hegemonic forces, but more importantly, by their self-conscious creation of knowledge geared towards achieving both individual and social change in the context of extreme anti-black oppression and racialization. This is by no means, a denial of the context of struggle and resistance in which most Black historical and intellectual works were produced; rather, it is an effort to move beyond the over-emphasis on critiques and the reductionism that stays blind to the knowledge schema that Black people produced even within such extremely difficult circumstances. This project, as a way of imagining Blackness in a humanizing fashion, aims to show that Black people have created a body of cultural knowledge that transcends disciplinary lines in science, social theory, art,

philosophy, and other fields. It includes useful theoretical constructs, paradigms, and models of viewing and seeing the world; while alluding to the fact of the marginalizing of this body of knowledge in the dominant body of scholarship is a troublesome phenomenon.⁹³

The two broad categories of Black epistemological thought that are explored in this research work are (1) Black epistemologies as self or personal epistemologies, and (2) Black epistemologies as political epistemologies. The first category, Black epistemologies of the self, explores the affective ways in which Black thinkers have conceived of the notion of Black agency concerning thoughts and actions while expressing individual power, and the choices made to transform arduous existential conditions. This exploration explores the conscious construction of the *knowing self* by Black folks against the assumed episteme of the natural inferiority of an adjudged “worthless” race, in the imaginary of Eurocentric and Anglo-American norms of rationality. Part of the age-long colonial and imperialistic project of the western philosophical praxis which is geared towards racializing and dehumanizing Black people both in the old and new worlds as inferior beings were to sustain the mythic notion of African descended peoples as lacking in capacity to create knowledge and formulate distinctive, robust and enduring social epistemologies.

Since it is generally granted that ideas rule the world, when African descended peoples are portrayed or caricatured as unable or incapable of formulating ideas and building knowledge schemes, it logically follows that they are being rendered as “outsiders” who have no reason to participate in ruling the world. Yet, we know that both of these portraiture are factually inaccurate. In “More Than Slaves: Black Founders, Benjamin Banneker, and Critical Intellectual Agency,” a documented historical research project on the epistemic contributions of Blacks to social progress in America, LaGarrett J. King argues that although in sociological

studies, Black Americans during the colonial period, are mostly erroneously understood as slaves with a limited agency; actual studies of the heroic acts of Blacks during this period proves that they exhibited positive human agency towards the rupturing of oppressive systems and the development of systems of rational thought and various intellectual strategies that helped Blacks garner freedom.⁹⁴ While the task of debunking the myth of Black inferiority has been given considerable attention within the Black intellectual tradition in works such as Tom Burrell's *Brainwashed: Challenging the Myth of Black Inferiority*, Gavin Evan's *Black Brain, White Brain*, Robert W. Sussman's *The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea*, and Jacqueline Jones' *A Dreadful Deceit: The Myth of Race from the Colonial Era to Obama's America*, not many studies have been done on the actual excavation and articulation of the systematized bodies of knowledge created by Black people as a template for understanding self-epistemologies from the Black perspective.

Black self-knowledge or personal epistemology as explored in this work primarily looks at how Black people, both historically and contemporaneously, have understood the linkage between belief-formation and self-transformation. It also considers issues and problems related to the nature or conception of knowledge held by Black people in different existential circumstances and how these conceptions are related to learning, teaching, and education.⁹⁵ In "Domain Specificity of Personal Epistemology," Barbara K. Hofer suggests that personal epistemologies are those beliefs that an individual holds about knowledge, knowing, and are related to learning and achievement thus, differentiating these beliefs by disciplines.⁹⁶ Thus, focusing on the attitudes of Blacks towards learning and self-development and knowledge formation, even in the most difficult circumstances of slavery, Jim Crow oppression and endemic racialized discrimination attest to the significance of Black genius. In this instance, Black self-

knowledge is construed as a form of Black epistemic power—power as not necessarily repressive, but productive in terms of self-actualization, resistance, and coming to voice which forces us to acknowledge that Blackness in itself is a point of affirmation and reclaiming.⁹⁷ This is why this epistemological discourse characterizes its subject matter, not in terms of exogenous socially constructed or metaphysically set forces (i.e., the functioning of “race” and “racialization” within anti-black racism); rather, situates its interpretive lens on an epistemic, expressive and self-representative act in the creation of a black “self” and black “world(s).”⁹⁸

Apart from the focusing of Black epistemological theorizing on the project of theorizing Black agency and self-knowledge in the age of unreason; this work also focuses on how people of African descent or Black people engage in the self-conscious shaping of their reality and the generation of knowledge schemes that makes sustained the vision of survival and the promise of freedom. It explores how African thinkers have explained the meaning of epistemology, the classical nature of reality, the process of knowing, the purpose of knowledge.⁹⁹ While noting that the generation of social knowledge, science, cultural artifacts, and so on, by a subjugated people is in part influenced and informed by historical, cultural, and political contexts. Such knowledge comes out of a critical examination of the paradigms the dominant society uses to understand and control them.¹⁰⁰ This issue of “control” or “epistemic control” can function both at the individual level and at the level of the community just in the same way agency functions. If we consider the dominant epistemic frames within society and its attempt to represent Blacks as “inferior” or pathological, what this reveal is a system of epistemic control that puts the achievement of “self-knowledge” outside of the domain of Black subjects. In research within the field of psychology, it is recognized that at the center of pathology is the individual’s inability to control the self. One of the amazing things about the human mind when one looks at it from the point of view of the

so-called unconscious, is that the individual who does not know himself and does not know the reality, is the individual who escapes from self-knowledge, is an individual who does not know the roots and bases of his actions.¹⁰¹ This explains why Black subjects are not regarded as worthy epistemic subjects, a debased perception of an absence of control of the self which is how many pathological theories and ethnological assumptions were concretized into theoretical truths about the nature or soul of Black folks within hegemonic epistemic circles.

At a time when racism and institutionalized and prejudiced ethnological research was used as a heuristic to undermine and deny the humanity of Black people, Black thinkers were grappling with the question of self-knowledge as a way of imagining strategies for Black humanization and racial uplift. This is evident in the intellectual preoccupation of Black men and women from the colonial through the post-reconstruction era. For instance, the writings and documented research of W.E.B. Du Bois was largely inspired by such an epistemological preoccupation. In his *Autobiography*, Du Bois emphasized that the hindering of Black progress or prosperity was not merely a function of economic barriers based on race prejudice. He considers race-prejudice (such as the narrative within the dominant culture that describes Blacks as an inferior race) as an obstacle to Black self-knowledge, especially when this is internalized by Black people. Du Bois stresses that a great part of the problem is an intellectual deficiency, lack of self-knowledge, or technical competence on the part of Black people. As he puts it; “work for black folk which would lead to a more prosperous future was not easy to come by. Just why this was so it is difficult to say; it was not solely race prejudice, although this played its part; of was lack of training and understanding, reluctance to venture into unknown surroundings, and fear.” Du Bois essentially describes this striving as the battle of the mind.¹⁰²

That is, the mind is the ultimate site for personal or self-transformation for Black folks which needs to be nurtured and trained to ensure the progress of the Black race. Robert W. Williams, in “Embracing Philosophy: On DuBois’ ‘The Individual and Social Conscience,’” argues that the emphasis that Du Bois places here on the development of the Black mind illustrates the vital role of Black subjectivity, especially in terms of consciousness understood as identity, in building a healthy self-concept and self-understanding.¹⁰³ More specifically he suggests that for DuBois, subjectivity focused on the significance of the experience to the Black individual her or himself and thereby manifested in how s/he interpreted as well as acted in the world.¹⁰⁴ Thus, two components of DuBois’ idea of subjectivity emerge here: human agency and ideals (and the latter’s associated material values for improving the conditions of Black folks in the material world. It is on this basis that Du Bois would in “Sociology Hesitant,” go on to strongly criticize sociological theories of knowledge advanced by “classical” social scientists like Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer for failing to investigate the true object of knowledge, by pursuing abstract understandings of society which DuBois refers to as “metaphysical wanderings” instead of pursuing the study of the “Individual Man.” The study of real humans, their mental dispositions to the world, and contributions made to human civilization—not metaphysical lay figures.¹⁰⁵ These aspects of Black intellectual heritage which concerns Black epistemological contributions, in regard to the development of the concept of self-knowledge or personal epistemologies, is what has not been definitively captured in Africana philosophical scholarship today.

The second category, which looks at Black epistemology as a form of political epistemology, which focuses on the connections between the axis of knowledge and social power; especially emphasizing how Blacks have developed political epistemologies to drive or

initiate the process of social transformation and the project of racial uplift. The concept of Black political epistemology, as considered in this work, does not entail the hegemonic frameworks of political epistemology developed by scholars like Jeffrey Friedman and Duncan Kennedy which primarily essentializes the reliability of elites' knowledge of the causes of and cures for social and economic problems as a form of "normative" political epistemology.¹⁰⁶ The allusion to the "normative" introduces a politics of knowledge that bifurcates between epistemic categories that are acknowledged and those that are disparaged. This work rejects the idea of "normative" political epistemology as hegemonic because it excludes Black knowledges and epistemes that are developed within different social contexts—mostly the contexts of struggle. Although, this work does not essentialize struggle as the predominant frame of capturing Black intellectual contributions to human civilization, its considerations on Black political epistemologies concern the knowledges that emerge from social and political struggles and cannot be separated from such struggles. They are not, therefore, epistemologies in the conventional sense of the word. Their aim is not to study knowledge or justified belief as such, let alone the social and historical context in which they both emerge.

Their aim, rather, is to identify and valorize that which often does not even appear as knowledge in the light of the dominant epistemologies, that which emerges instead as part of the struggles of resistance against oppression and against the knowledge that legitimates such oppression.¹⁰⁷ This is what Boaventura de Sousa Santos in *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South* refers to as "lived knowledges" which are experiential epistemologies. This is why George J. Sefa Dei argues in *Reframing Blackness and Black Solidarities through Anti-Colonial and Decolonial Prisms*, that because "normative epistemology" sees racialized, oppressed, colonized, and indigenous bodies from a place of

negation, this skewed way of looking at the world needs to be rejected and it should be replaced with a “new” epistemological vision. This new epistemological vision is that which conceives of Blackness in relation to knowing—in terms of personal, social, cultural, political, and economic processes embedded in particular time-space contexts, which are constituted within local, regional, national and transnational dimensions.¹⁰⁸ This is a reversal of the discourse of power and knowledge from “disembodied subjects,” within “normative epistemology,” to that which is related to Blackness and Black identity (embodied subjects). This notion of power here is not necessarily conceived as repressive, but productive in terms of self-actualization, resistance, and coming to voice. While at the same time asserting a Black experiential mode of knowing, Blackness/Black identity that challenges conventional readings is about coming to voice.¹⁰⁹

These experiential epistemologies take seriously the connection between knowledge and social action. So, the Black political epistemological perspective explored in this work, focuses on understanding the connection between the mental and the material, and the interpretation of the content of the structure of the Black experience. In her very incisive essay entitled, “How is Epistemology Political?” Linda Alcoff echoes this sentiment when she asserts that “epistemology is not simply a collection of texts but a social practice engaged in by specific kinds of participants in prescribed situations.”¹¹⁰ Thus, no epistemology is adequate which does not take political things into account,¹¹¹ and Black thought leaders and intellectuals have long understood that the zone of political things is an extremely fruitful field to begin epistemological investigations and the task of racial uplift.

For instance, the years of sociological study W.E.B. embarked upon at Atlanta to understand the condition of Black folks in an anti-Black world, profoundly explores the affiliations between thought, knowledge, and social action. DuBois and the Atlanta School never

ignored uncomfortable facts about their subject matter (Black folks) but believed that an objective and scientific approach would have emancipatory effects. The vision of sociological study charted by the Atlanta school is one that values both detailed quantitative and qualitative studies of the lives of the poor and oppressed Blacks and an analysis of the structures that constrain and shape their lives. It is a sociology that recognizes the importance of political and organizational sociology and the creation of states, institutions, and policies that create structures of domination. It is a sociology that recognizes the importance of studying the social movements that challenge structures of domination. It is a sociology that recognizes the interplay of social constructions and material conditions.¹¹² The in-depth examination of DuBois's scholarship reveals a sophisticated theory of knowledge positing a complex interconnection among historical, social scientific, and literary modes of inquiry.¹¹³

The discourse on Black political epistemology in this work also explores socio-political strategies and epistemes developed by Blacks to counteract white supremacy politics in America and how Black folks were able to develop self-learning skills and techniques in great conditions of repression, including how they recorded their experiences under slavery and how such techniques and strategies were utilized and shared within Black slave communities to gain manumission or freedom. This exploration also exposes the understanding that Black folks showed in their undoing and rejection of the categories of the unknowing Being that was projected unto them by white ontology and systems of knowledge. It focuses on what it means to center Blackness as the grounding for navigating the world through the evolution of political thought systems that threads together, the beliefs that human action can have an effect on political outcomes—which is vital to a striving group. The theorization of Black epistemology, in this work, does not merely take seriously the subjective articulations of world-views or Black

systems of thought, but it also takes seriously the material socio-political implications that the ideas Blacks formulated have in terms of the meaningful interpretation of the Black experience, especially as it relates to African Americans' experiences of prejudice, discrimination, and also the imaginations of hope for the future.

In *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, have been able to document the role of the Black church as an important social, religious, and political institution that provided a platform for the evolution and transference of Black political epistemologies that ultimately transformed or improved the conditions of the Black race. In this regard, she highlights the role that Black women played to bring about social and personal transformation to Blacks through various knowledge schemes. Higginbotham argues that women were crucial to broadening the public arm of the church and making it one of the most powerful institutions of racial self-help in the African American community.¹¹⁴ She also emphasized “the politics of respectability” as a Black socio-political episteme that was developed as a life-guiding philosophy which has both affective and political dimensions. The politics of respectability emphasized reform of individual behavior and attitudes both as a goal in itself and a strategy for reform of the entire structural system of American race relations.¹¹⁵ Similarly, Mary Jo Deegan, in *The New Woman of Color, has* highlighted how Black leaders such as Fannie Barrier Williams contributed immensely to shaping the socio-political destinies of Black folks through the emphasis on the connection between the formulation of ideas and social transformation. In “The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States Since the Emancipation Proclamation,” Fannie B. Williams talked about the concept of “intelligent womanhood” through which she imagines such paths towards social transformation. The path of progress in the picture of “intelligent womanhood” is conceived to bring to view

these trustful and zealous supporters of freedom and civilization striving to overtake and keep pace with women whose emancipation has been a slow and painful process for a thousand years. It also emphasized the longing to be something better than they were when freedom found them has been the most notable characteristic in the development of these women.¹¹⁶

The two broad categories of Black epistemologies (self-knowledge/personal epistemologies and political epistemologies) are not studied in this work as isolated systems of thought, rather they are examined as aspects of Black epistemological thinking within Africana philosophy that reinforces each other. For instance, in his program for the development of Black intellect and Black humanity, DuBois ascribed a simultaneous role for intuition and social science as sources of inspiration for his “program of social uplift.” This complementarity between social science and other modes of knowledge acquisition and the explicit linkage to efforts to promote social change were exhibited in his activities throughout his lifetime.¹¹⁷ Even though DuBois understood that the social conditions stacked against Blacks’ progress or the thriving of the Black race, he was omnisciently convinced that something had to be done, both at the individual and social levels to create a chance for survival for the Black race. Against all odds, DuBois still felt the need to apply what he had learned as a student of philosophy to social problems because knowledge without application, theory without practice, or policy implications, or for that matter, art for art’s sake made no sense to him.¹¹⁸ This is why Adolph L. Reed, Jr., asserts that W.E.B. Du Bois, is by all accounts a central figure in the history of Afro-American political activity, a major contributor to a half- century’s debate over the condition of and proper goals and strategies for the Black population.¹¹⁹ In *W.E.B. Du Bois and American Political Thought* Adolph L. Reed, Jr would go on to describe Du Bois as perhaps the most systematic thinker (at least insofar as coherent writing is the expression of systematic thought).

No other Black intellectual or activist has written so much or so widely, and few have been so insistent on grounding strategic thinking on clear normative and theoretical principles.¹²⁰

The genius of Du Bois, in terms of exploring the connection between individual and social aspects of knowledge, is clearly articulated in “The Training of Negroes [Blacks] for Social Power,” where Du Bois writes about the question of knowledge and the eschewing of ignorance—primarily emphasizing the value of knowledge. Du Bois contends that though “the Negro [Black] problem, it has often been said, is largely a problem of ignorance—not simply of illiteracy, but a deeper ignorance of the world and its ways, of thought and experience of men; an ignorance of self and possibilities of human souls. This can be gotten rid of only by training; and primarily such training must take the form of that sort of social leadership which we call education.”¹²¹ While Du Bois emphasizes the axis of self-epistemologies in his reflections here, he also emphasized the importance of institutional and social dimensions of education in the task of Black racial uplift. In this same essay, Du Bois further contends that:

[the] spread of intelligence alone will not solve the Negro [Black] problem. If this problem is largely a question of ignorance, it is also scarcely less a problem of poverty. If Negroes [Blacks] are to assume the responsibility of raising standards of living among themselves, the power of intelligent work and leadership toward proper industrial ideals must be placed in their hands. Economic efficiency depends on intelligence, skill, and thrift. The public-school system is designed to furnish the necessary intelligence for the ordinary worker, the secondary school for the more gifted workers, and the college for the exceptional few.¹²²

This implies that for Du Bois, there are different sub-layers of development to the development of social power for Blacks; underneath the quest for socio-economic prosperity lies the development of consciousness. Here, we see Du Bois exploring the epistemological dimensions of self-knowledge and political knowledge formation as important for the achievement of self-freedom and the transformation of the social conditions for Black folks.

Thus, if Africana philosophy is “a term that references any number of perspectives, critiques, or political theories concerning the life, experiences, and historical struggles of Black people,”¹²³ as well as the “effort to catalog and study the many creations of African peoples, their contributions to the treasure-houses of human civilization.”¹²⁴ Then this research work will significantly contribute to this field of inquiry in its exploration of “systematic” reflections and articulations concerning two important aspects of knowledge formation or Black epistemologies within the discourse of Africana philosophy. This work argues that through the discourse of Black epistemologies (self-knowledge/personal epistemologies and political epistemologies) we can arrive at a new imagination of Blackness—a humanizing vision of Blackness. This vision entails the encapsulation of the relational connection between conditions of human knowledge and the conditions of human freedom, as developed by representative thinkers within the Black intellectual tradition. The Black epistemological schemes that are explored in this work look towards both self-transformation and socio-political re-ordering of structures of power—that is, knowledge is considered as a site of Black social and self-transformation. These dynamics between knowledge, self, and social transformation—reveals a long-tradition of Black epistemological reflections that are currently underrepresented within the discourse of Africana philosophy.

To this end, the other five chapters in this work, looks at representative thinkers or figures within the Black intellectual tradition and the philosophical underpinnings of their thoughts and ideas that orients us towards an epistemological discourse. The works and thoughts of these thinkers are considered in this work as systematized bodies of knowledge that shows the genius contributions that Black people have made to human liberation and particularly to

advance the progress of the Black race within a sociological context that does not place much value on Black intellect and Black lives.

Chapter Organization

Chapter two, “Blackness and the Crisis of Knowledge: Impediments to the Formation of Black Self-Epistemologies in the Space of ‘Reasons’” explores the historical construction or “destruction” of the notion of Blackness in Western epistemologies, rooted in 19th century ethnological science and theories of racial hierarchy in the United States. This historical investigation aims to excavate the impediments to the formation of Black epistemologies of the self within the discourse of knowledge. It challenges the fundamental assumptions in Euro-American epistemology that knowledge-constructs and the capacity to ‘reason’ primarily resides in the rational Caucasian “self” and outside of the Black subject. This so-called ‘rational self’ often without a body or *disembodied*, is regarded as the only being capable of grasping the material, analytic and synthetic truths. This ‘rational self’ is also the authorial agent that is capable of epistemic awareness and has the power to make or unmake claims to knowledge. Therefore, the crucial question that is raised in this chapter concerns whether the Black subject can express epistemic authority over the process of knowledge acquisition and whether Black thinkers have deliberated on this type of question. It will explore the works of Black thinkers such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Phillis Wheatley, Maria Stewart, and Franz Fanon, to argue that there is evidence of the development of Black epistemologies of the self within the Black intellectual tradition.

Chapter three, “Against Mental Darkness: Fredrick Douglass on Black Self-Knowledge and Anticolonial Epistemology,” examines how darkness and light are used metaphorically to represent the threshold of ignorance and knowledge respectively, especially as it was used to

designate and demarcate the realms of existence between Black slaves and those who own such slaves as properties, in colonial America. Black slaves in colonial America were mostly constricted by law, including generally accepted (pseudo) scientific beliefs about Black inferiority, and by standard practice to the realm of mental darkness—the zone of ignorance or *unknowing*. Any slaves who dared to transgress such epistemological ethos are met with stiff penalties; they are sometimes forcefully sold, flogged, starved, including other forms of extreme punishments, that their “owners’ deem appropriate to the degree of transgression. It is under such extreme conditions imposed by a debauched epistemological ethos that Fredrick Douglass—the *Heroic Slave*—stood against being constrained to the realm of mental darkness. For instance, in the *Narrative*, Douglass recounts how his slave master Mr. Auld viscerally scolded his wife, Mrs. Auld for daring to assist him in learning how to spell words. Douglass writes using the words of his master; “If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master—to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world.” Now, said he, “if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master.”¹²⁵

What Douglass brings to the fore here touches on how ignorance as devised both systematically and literally as a weapon of colonization and enslavement. What Douglass revealed, concerning how he was punished for daring to transgress his condition of slavery by the transforming of his mind, provides a vision into what it means to think about how Black people thought about self-knowledge even in such despicable conditions of slavery. It also reveals the violence involved in the process of eschewing Black people from the domain of learning and preventing them from gaining knowledge—which is one of the most vicious forms

of intellectual violence that Black people experienced during slavery. This chapter argues that we can derive a plausible notion of self-knowledge and anti-colonial epistemology from the philosophical thoughts of Fredrick Douglass. It shows that Fredrick Douglass understood mental darkness—the realm of the *unknowing Being*, as a mark of colonial oppression and throughout his life and times, he strove and worked to develop a distinctive notion of Black epistemology that was directed at developing the political consciousness of Black folks and marshaling ideas towards the future of the Black race.

Chapter four, “In the Spirit of Biko: Black Consciousness as Anticolonial Epistemology,” attempts attempt a reading of Steve Biko’s Black Consciousness as an anti-colonial epistemology that embodies a form of Black resistance aimed at demolishing the structures of colonial hegemony, psychopathologies, including oppressive epistemologies that confront the lived experience of Black people in the African diaspora. It explores Biko’s revelation, in his diagnostic of the Black condition under white-colonial repression, that the prime objective of colonialist is to conquer the Black mind. This is what informs Steve Biko oft-quoted remark that “the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.” My work explores this revelation as both a philosophy of the Black mind and as an anti-colonial epistemology that seeks to challenge the pathologies of Western hegemony and the conscription of Blackness to nothingness—as well as the emphasis on a new vision of thinking for Black people that mirrors Fanon’s vision of a new humanism. This work explores two epistemological dimensions that are present in Biko’s philosophy of Black consciousness, namely, affective and political epistemologies. They are both considered from a philosophical angle and the position of praxis—in terms of Black social mobilization and the transformation of oppressive social mechanisms or social structures. I argue that Biko’s philosophy of Black consciousness has

profound implications for the notion Black mental freedom and for the notions of Being and becoming, self-identity, and autonomy—which are all useful for building political epistemologies for mobilizing against colonial domination and resistance against hegemonic systems that categorize black existence as subaltern or “Other.” This chapter argues that Biko’s philosophy of Black consciousness embodies two important epistemological dimensions of resistance, namely, cognitive-affective and political epistemologies.

Chapter five, “All Power to the People: Huey P. Newton’s Revolutionary Intercommunalism as a Black Anti-Imperialist Epistemology,” moves beyond the common but sensational view of Huey P. Newton as the leader of Black Panther Party that gained notoriety from its inception in the late 1960s for organizing Black men and women to resist America’s oppressive power structure and the systematic injustice against Black folks. I am interested in exploring the deeply philosophical views of Huey P. Newton, the principal theoretician of the Party. During the lifespan of the Party, Newton formulated various political ideas which were rapidly involving and changing based on social realities and the extent of his understandings of the manifestations of the global tentacles of American imperialism. He, along with other revolutionaries, deployed such ideas in fashioning the goals, strategies, and modus operandi of the Party within and beyond the Black communities in America. Most scholars that studies the history and activities of this movement agree that the Panthers’ political discourse was in a constant state of flux based on the complexity of the social context of its formulations and the repressive policies of the state. However, there were some general areas where the ideals, ideas, and political leanings of the Party never wavered—especially in its adherence to a philosophy of care that focuses primarily on improving the Black condition. For instance, the October 1966 Black Panther Party platform and program essentially were based on putting up a system that

emphasizes the Black experience as well as the importance of racial solidarity. The platform dealt solely with the problems, grievances, and demands of the dispossessed Black population. In this way, it acknowledged Black people's unique identity, which is a primary principle of Black nationalism. The first point of the ten-point program proclaims: "we believe that Black people will not be free until we are able to determine our destiny." Self-determination is the essence of the concept of a nation.¹²⁶

Thus, this chapter explores the philosophical basis of Newton's conception of the notion of Black self-determination and how such views can orient us towards his views on Black epistemologies of the self. For instance, in *Revolutionary Suicide*, Newton speaks of revolutionary/liberatory consciousness as a psychological disposition that is crucial for raising the consciousness of Black people towards achieving self-reliance, self-determination, and self-knowledge within a social context where everything points to the erasure of a healthy conception of the Black self. Newton's notion of revolutionary consciousness is constructed on an understanding of a Black epistemology that advocates the exercise of Black agency in a manner that confronts systems of oppression even if ultimately this results in death (revolutionary suicide). This chapter also explores one of the highpoints of Newton's philosophical reflections and revolutionary thinking which culminates in the formation of his concept of "revolutionary intercommunalism." This political philosophy developed by Newton is explored in this essay as a form of Black political epistemology—specifically a Black anti-imperialist epistemology. In his doctoral dissertation entitled *War Against the Panthers*, Newton describes the central tenet of revolutionary intercommunalism, which holds that "contradiction is the ruling principle of the universe;" meaning that everything is in a constant state of transformation.¹²⁷ It is the recognition of these principles that gave birth to many of the successes that the Party was able to achieve at

home and abroad and it also served as a unifying principle for the poor and the oppressed across the world. This chapter, which considers Newton's notion of revolutionary intercommunalism as a political epistemology aims to offer a fresh perspective on how the so-called countries in the global south can break away from the chains from the global reach of the imperialist exploitation of the United States. The work concludes by re-emphasizing the need for a disciplinary focus on Black epistemology in Africana thought that accounts for the contributions Black people have made to knowledge and human civilization.

In chapter six, the work concludes by re-emphasizing the need for a novel attempt to explore "Black epistemology" as a new sub-disciplinary focus in Africana philosophy. In the same way, other areas of sub-disciplinary focus in Africana/Black philosophy, such as Black existentialism, Black aesthetics, Black political philosophy, Black philosophy of literature, explores different dimensions of Black intellectual history, this work embarks on a philosophical study of the nature and limits of human knowledge as understood primarily by Black folks through different historical periods and how such understanding was utilized to comprehend the world we live in. This work challenges the constellation of ideas and knowledge schema in contemporary philosophy or epistemology that grounds what it means for humans to possess and disseminate knowledge in abstracted forms and analytical objects adjudged to be comprehensible through "reason." It also examines how Black intellectuals have developed and constructed various kinds of theories to make sense of the world, unlike the emphasis of "reason" in contemporary philosophical discourse. This work argues that Black intellectuals needed to move away from the Euro-American canonization of "reason" as a method for making sense of the world because they were able to unravel how "reason" was used as a justification enslaving Black folks and for perpetuating the myth of Black inferiority. It exposes how such

characterizations of “reason” as the gauge for knowledge, when disrobed of its analytic garb, enables the erasure of Blackness from the conversations about how to make sense of the world through epistemic schemas. The present order of knowledge in contemporary philosophical discourse is invested in the erasure of Blackness from epistemological considerations, even though Black thinkers, throughout the history of ideas, have considered questions regarding the nature and scope of knowledge as well as the divination of social truths to dismiss the negative characterizations of Blackness in the world, as a way of ensuring the social progress of the Black race.

Thus, this work aims to address this problem of erasure of Blackness from the discourse of knowledge by centering Blackness as the basis for a Black epistemological inquiry within Africana philosophy. It raises the question in regard to what it means to think of Black thinkers as epistemologists, especially concerning the creation and dissemination of knowledge in particular areas of inquiry. This implies that epistemological considerations are not the prerogative of thinkers within western philosophical praxis; it is something that Black thinkers have given a great deal of consideration as well. This is why in this work, Black thinkers are not considered as commentators, critics, revolutionaries, or insurgents offering “mere ideological” critiques to hegemonic systems of knowledge and practices, but as primarily epistemologists—who are writing about the importance of knowledge towards achieving individual and social transformation in an anti-Black world. They also considered the questions of acquiring knowledge for its own sake and the relevance of such an endeavor for developing the human mind. When we consider Black thinkers primarily as epistemologists, it presents a different sense of Blackness, a humanized sense of Blackness. Since the process of acquiring and using knowledge to transform one’s circumstances is part of what it means to be human, it follows that

when Blackness is eschewed from the discussions about knowledge, there is “no humanity involved.”

Therefore, the objective of this work is to center Blackness in the discourse on knowledge to emphasize Black humanity in ways that are not valued in the present order of knowledge. It is also an exploration of Black genius about the question of knowledge production, acquisition, and utilization to resolve the problems that confront Black folks in the world. To achieve this objective, this work taps into the rich tradition of Black intellectual history for its historical and contemporaneous analysis concerning fashioning unique perspectives on the architecture of epistemological thinking within the discourse of Africana/Black philosophy.

References

1. It needs to be mentioned here as well that Leonard Harris’ edited anthology titled, *Philosophy Born of Struggle: Anthology of Afro-American Philosophy from 1917*, published by Kendall Publishing Company in 1983 is one of the pioneering works that sought to establish an Afro-American perspective or worldview in philosophy. In this compilation, Harris provided a select bibliography of Afro-American works in philosophy, though not an exhaustive list, it was a marked attempt to forge a Black philosophical tradition and a documentation of published philosophical reflections of Black people that began from the earliest parts of the twentieth century. Other important publications (although representative) in this regard include, August Meier’s *Negro Thought in America 1880-1915* (Michigan Press, 1963); H. Brotz’s edited volume, *African-American Social & Political Thought 1850-1920* (Transaction Publishers, 1992), and D. Sterling’s edited volume, *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*, (W.W. Norton), 1984.

2. For Jones, what is at stake in delineating the praxis for black philosophical scholarship has to do with epistemic authority. The authority of blacks to describe reality as they perceive it. With this understanding at stake, blacks announce their own inferiority if they do not force the established philosophies to revalidate themselves and reconstruct their normative apparatus in light of the black perspective. See. Williams R. Jones, “The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy: Some Preliminary Considerations,” *The Philosophical Forum* 9, no. 2 (1977):157.

3. Although Cornel West claims that his intention was to interrogate Afro-American past and critically evaluate Afro-American responses to crucial challenges in the present, while attempting to understand the Afro-American experience in order to enhance and enrich the lives of Afro-Americans, he fails to see how his subscription to Eurocentric or Western philosophical

paradigm as the normative or axiomatic principles for achieving these is deeply problematic and counterintuitive. See. Cornel West, "Philosophy and the Afro-American Experience," *The Philosophical Forum*, 9, no. 2/3, (winter-spring, 1997-78):148.

4. Jones, "The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy," 157.

5. I use the term "Blackness" in this work in a broad sense of identity-category and the lived experience of African descended peoples across the globe—in the plural African diasporas. There is a form of power that comes with conceiving "Blackness" in this fluid sense, which accrues from the richness of the Black experience, not as a monolith but as an ever-evolving axiomatic references to the experiential world at differently stages of earthly metamorphosis. This characterization of Blackness is similar to what Eric Dyson refers to as "the plasticity of Blackness" in "Tour(é)ing Blackness," the way this notion conforms to such bewildering array of identities and struggles, and defeats the attempt to bind its meanings to any one camp or creature, makes a lot of Black folk nervous and defensive. Also, in "Forty Million Ways to be Black," Touré Neblett argues that the concept of Blackness ought not to be looked at from a monolithic perspective because such a perspective would not capture the range of Black identity. In his view, there is no dogmatically narrow view of authentic Blackness because the possibilities for Black identity are infinite. To say something or someone is not Black—or is inauthentically Black—is to sell Blackness short. This explains why Michelle M. Wright, upon his critical reading of Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, argues that "any truly accurate definition of an African diasporic identity, then must somehow simultaneously incorporate the diversity of Black identities in the diaspora yet also link all those identities to show that they indeed constitute a diaspora rather than an unconnected aggregate of different peoples linked only by name." See. Eric Dyson, "Tour(é)ing Blackness," in *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness? What It Means to be Black Now*, ed. Touré Neblett (New York: Free Press, 2011), xi-xviii; Touré Neblett, *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness? What It Means to be Black Now*, ed. Touré Neblett (New York: Free Press, 2011), 5; Michelle Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 2; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Manning Marable and Vanessa Agard-Jones, ed. *Transnational Blackness: Navigating the Global Color Line* (New York: Macmillan Palgrave, 2008).

6. E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), p. 10

7. Even before his acclaimed 1939 book, *The Negro Family in the United States*, Frazier avouched in several of his 1920s articles that (1) slavery had destroyed most-if not all---of the remnants of African culture among African Americans; and (2) the inimical conditions of slavery were a primary source of many of the psychological and social problems that African Americans experienced. Frazier especially addressed the adverse consequences for the African American family, to which he gave much attention. Frazier's interest in the African American family and the impact slavery had on its structure and on its members was best discerned in two articles he published in the 1920s: 1) "Is the Negro Family a Unique Sociological Unit?" and (2) "Three Scourges of the Negro Family." In each, Frazier identified some unflattering features of the African American family that he maintained were fundamentally generated from the horrors of slavery and its consequences. He delineated reasons why the "Negro" family was a unique sociological unit. One of the reasons, which he appeared to believe was most central, was the

- break in cultural continuity from Africa. This cultural disconnect, Frazier asserted, had demoralizing implications for sex mores and for family control among enslaved Africans. See Jerome H. Schiele, "E. Franklin Frazier and the Interfacing of Black Sociology and Black Social Work," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 26, no. 2 (June 2015): 110-111. Also. E. Franklin Frazier, "Three Scourges of the Negro family," *Opportunity* 4, no. 43 (1926): 210-213.
8. E. Franklin Frazier, "Is the Negro Family a Unique Sociological Unit?" *Opportunity* 5, no. 6 (1927): 165-166.
 9. Vincent Harding, "The Vocation of the Black Scholar and the Struggles of the Black Community," *Harvard Educational Review*. Monograph Series. No. 2 (1994): 5.
 10. *Ibid.*, 14.
 11. Barbara Ransby, "Remembering Vincent G. Harding (1931-2014)," *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society* 16, nos. 1-2 (2014): 140-142.
 12. Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (New York: Quill, 1984), 451.
 13. *Ibid.*, 452.
 14. *Ibid.*
 15. The essay under this title, "Africana Philosophy," is a substantial revision of "African, African-American, Africana Philosophy" published in *Philosophical Forum* XXIV(1-3) (Fall-Spring 1992-1993), pp. 63-93. This same essay is also published in the revised form in L. Outlaw, *On Race and Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
 16. Lucius Outlaw, "Africana Philosophy," *The Journal of Ethics* 1, no. 3 (1997): 265.
 17. *Ibid.*, 267.
 18. Lucius Outlaw Jr., *On Race and Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
 19. Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Washington DC: AMS Press, 1977), 3-4. (Reprint of the 1933 ed.)
 20. Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro in Our History* (Washington, DC: The Associated Publishers, 1922), 13.
 21. Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, xiii.
 22. Ama Mazama, "Introduction: Special Issue of JBS: Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the First Doctoral Program in Black Studies," *Journal of Black Studies* 49, no. 6 (Sept 2018): 529.
 23. Lewis Gordon, "Disciplinary Decadence and the Decolonization of Knowledge," *Africa Development* XXXIX, no. 1 (2014): 86.
 24. *Ibid.*
 25. Lewis R. Gordon, *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995), 131.
 26. *Ibid.*, 135.
 27. *Ibid.*, 136.
 28. Lewis R. Gordon, *Existential Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 7.
 29. *Ibid.*, 9.
 30. Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 114.
 31. Derek Kelly, "The Logic of Black Philosophy," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 10, (Spring 1972): 87.

32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., 88.
34. Tommy J. Curry, "The Derelictical Crisis of African American Philosophy: How African American Philosophy Fails to Contribute to the Study of African Descended People," *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no.3(2011): 317.
35. Ibid., 320.
36. Itibaru, M. Zulu, "Dude, Where's My Black Studies Department? The Quagmire of Interdisciplinary Black Diaspora Studies," *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies* 12, no. 7 (December 2018): 5-7.
37. Molefi Kete Asante, "The Relentless Pursuit of Discipline: An Africological March Toward Knowledge Liberation," *Journal of Black Studies* 49, no. 6 (2018) 537.
38. This term is used here it signify the commonsense usage of that term, which denotes people who have been racially positioned as black and the life-worlds or lived experiences that these people have constructed. For instance, in *The Challenge of Blackness* Lerone Bennett raises this question: what is the true meaning of blackness? He goes on to define Blackness as that universe of values and attitudes and orientations which rises, like dew, from the depths of Black ancestral experience and pulls us towards distant shores of Black destiny. In "The case of Blackness," Fred Moten argues for a notion or an understanding of Blackness that moves beyond the accentuation of pathology. He considered this as a crucial task because, as he sees it, the cultural and political discourse on black pathology has been so pervasive that it could be said to constitute the background against which all representations of blacks, blackness, or (the color) black take place. Moten further stresses that it grappling with the notion of Blackness, one has to recognize that its manifestations have changed over the years, though it has always been poised between the realms of the pseudo-social scientific, the birth of new sciences, and the normative impulse that is at the heart of—but strains against—the black radicalism that strains against it. See. Fred Moten, "The Case of Blackness," *Criticism* 50, no. 2 (Spring 2008):177-218. See also, Lerone Bennett Jr., *The Challenge of Blackness* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1972), 34.
39. Sylvia Wynter, "A Black Studies Manifesto," *Forum N.H.I: Knowledge for the 21st Century* 1, no.1 (Fall 1994): 6.
40. Jason R. Ambrose and Sabine Broeck, "Black Knowledges/Black Struggles: An Introduction," in *Black Knowledges/Black Struggles: Essays in Critical Epistemology*, eds., Jason R. Ambrose and Sabine Broeck (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 7.
41. James J. Scheurich and Michelle D. Young, "Coloring Epistemologies: Are Our Research Epistemologies Racially Biased?" *Educational Researcher* 26, no. 4 (May, 1997) 4.
42. Shana Almeida, "Race-Based Epistemologies: The Role of Race and Dominance in Knowledge Production," *Wagadu* 13 (2015):108.
43. Sylvia Wynter, "A Black Studies Manifesto," 4.
44. Jason R. Ambrose and Sabine Broeck, 7.
45. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 7
46. Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), vii.
47. Ibid., 5.

48. Ibid., 25.

49. Under Jim Crow laws and customs, was made to make “the Negro” painfully and constantly aware that he lived in a society dedicated to the doctrine of white supremacy and the idea that “the Negro” is less than human. Jim Crow became synonymous with a complex system of racial laws and customs that ensured white social, legal, and political domination. Blacks were segregated, deprived of their right to vote and subject to abuse, discrimination, and violence without redress in the courts. This period was epitomized by a plethora of “White Only” signs on virtually every form of public convenience. This period of legalized Jim Crow in the South, and Jim Crow by custom in the North, lasted from 1877 to 1964, and ended with the Congressional passage of the Civil Rights Laws of 1964 and the Voting Rights Bill of 1965. These two revolutionary Congressional laws were the direct result of what has come to be known as the Civil Rights Movement which began in the 1940’s. Although many states made efforts to get around or avoid enforcement of these laws. See. Cecil J. Hunt II, “The Jim Crow Effect: Denial, Dignity, Human Rights, and Racialized Mass Incarceration,” *Journal of Civil Rights and Economic Development* 29, no.1 (2016): 22.

50. Tommy J. Curry, “The Nigger is Broken: Hyper-Masculinity, the Buck, and the Role of Physical Disability in White Anxiety Toward the Black Male Body,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 48, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 338.

51. What Fricker failed to recognize in her analysis, is the racism and anti-Black misandry that is at play in this scenario greatly overshadows and undermines any intimations of the agency she wishes to attribute to the Black male figure within a racist society. Anti-Black misandry consists of the projection of negative stereotypes on Black males that makes it impossible or difficult to ascribe the characteristics or traits of humanity to them. In “Killing Boogeymen,” Tommy J. Curry describes anti-Black misandry as “the cumulative assertions of Black male inferiority due to errant psychologies of lack, dispositions of deviance, or hyper-personality traits (e.g., hyper-sexuality, hyper-masculinity) which rationalize the criminalization, phobias and sanctioning of Black male life. These ideas are part of the group-based racial consciousness of white America and part of the social fabric and mythology of racism.” In other words, the caricatured portrayal of Black men that is borne out of hatred for members of this social group is what is referred to as anti-Black or racist misandry. Within the field of Black Male Studies, the concept of anti-Black misandry has generated a considerable amount of discussion. For instance, in his work geared towards the understanding of the Black male experience, Derrick Blooms describes anti-Black racism as encompassing the ways that Black men are racialized, simultaneously as invisible and hyper-visible, and problematized in U.S. society. This perspective is consistent with that of William A. Smith, Jalil Bishop Mustafa, Chantal M. Jones, Tommy J. Curry & Walter R. Allen, in “ ‘You Make Me Wanna Holler And Throw Up Both My Hands!’ ” where they described anti-Black misandry as an exaggerated pathological aversion toward Black men created and reinforced in societal, institutional, and individual ideologies, practices, and behaviors that are mostly driven by different manifestations of hatred of Black men. This form of hatred functions on the dual axes of race and sex/gender. In “Racial Battle Fatigue and the Mis-Education of Black Men: Racial Microaggressions, Societal Problems, and Environmental Stress,” William A. Smith, Man Hung, and Jeremy D. Franklin argue that what is identified as anti-Black misandry include the gendered and racialized forms of discrimination that Black men experiences such that they are deemed hypersexual beasts that require the most

brutal forms of societal protection against while at the same time seen as an inferior member of a “non-human” race. This is why William A. Smith, Tara J. Yosso and Daniel G. Solórzano, in “Racial Primes and Black Misandry on Historically White Campuses,” assert that the intersecting identities of Black men are a double burden due to race (i.e., anti-Black racism) and gender (i.e., Black misandry or anti-Black male attitudes and oppression). In this instance, the anti-Black misandric treatment of members of this group requires that Black men carry the burden of two negative social identities as they move through society, one as a member of the African American race (i.e., anti-Black racism and stereotypes) and the other as a Black male (i.e., Black misandry or anti-Black male ideologies, stereotypes, and oppression) with hypermasculine and oversexed features that makes it impossible for society to see them as something non-violent, non-threatening and above all—*human*. See. Derrick R. Brooms, *Being Black, Being Male on Campus: Understanding and Confronting Black Male Collegiate Experiences* (New York: SUNY Press, 2017), 19; William A. Smith, Man Hung and Jeremy D. Franklin, “Racial Battle Fatigue and the Mis-Education of Black Men: Racial Microaggressions, Societal Problems, and Environmental Stress,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 80, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 66; William A. Smith, Tara J. Yosso and Daniel G. Solórzano, “Racial Primes and Black Misandry on Historically White Campuses: Toward Critical Race Accountability in Educational Administration,” *Educational Administration Quarterly* 43, no. 5 (December 2007): 559; William A. Smith, Jalil Bishop Mustafa, Chantal M. Jones, Tommy J. Curry & Walter R. Allen, “‘You Make Me Wanna Holler And Throw Up Both My Hands!’: Campus Culture, Black Misandric Microaggressions, And Racial Battle Fatigue,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 29, no. 9 (2016): 1189-1209; Tommy J. Curry, “Killing Boogeymen: Phallicism and the Misandric Mischaracterizations of Black Males in Theory,” *Res Philosophica* 95, no. 2 (April 2018): 235-272; William A. Smith, “Toward an understanding Of Black Misandric Microaggressions and Racial Battle Fatigue In Historically White institutions,” in *The State of the African American Male in Michigan: A Courageous Conversation*, eds. Eboni M. Zamani-Gallaher and Vernon C. Polite (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012), 265-277.

52. Kristie Dotson, “Accumulating Epistemic Power: A Problem with Epistemology,” *Philosophical Topics* 46, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 132.

53. José Medina, “Toward a Foucaultian Epistemology of Resistance: Counter-Memory, Epistemic Friction, and Guerrilla Pluralism,” *Foucault Studies*, no.12 (October 2011): 32.

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CHAPTER II

BLACKNESS AND THE CRISIS OF KNOWLEDGE: IMPEDIMENTS TO THE FORMATION OF BLACK SELF-EPISTEMOLOGIES IN THE ‘SPACE OF REASON’

Given that within the viewpoint specific to our present culture’s biocentric conception of the human, not only must the phenomenon of mind and conscious experience remain a puzzle, but the processes by means of which we objectively construct ourselves...must necessarily continue to remain opaque to us. The result becomes that we are left unable to move beyond the limits of our adaptive order of objective knowledge...

—Sylvia Wynter, 2001

The epigraph above heralds the central issue that this chapter focuses on—Blackness and the crisis of knowledge. This crisis highlights how Blackness becomes a conceptual impossibility or an erased specter when adaptive or alien epistemological lenses become the medium or order of knowledge upon which conceptual schemes are constructed. What does it mean to think of the Black subject in relation to knowledge construction and doxastic avowals that privileges the idea of “reason,” “reasonability,” and “epistemic authority” grounded in abstracted notions of Being? Within the discourse of knowledge in Eurocentric/Anglo-American circles, Blackness is erased for not being able to participate in the ‘space of reasons.’ The ‘space of reasons’ is a metaphor that alludes to the Eurocentric order of “objective” knowledge that grounds epistemic authority and the power of knowledge in the “rational self,” mainly abstracted but powerful subjects. These subjects are designed or constructed to be powerful because they are categorized as possessing an ontological status that naturally emits attributes such as reasonability, knowability, discernment, and judgment. Under this imaginary, the ‘space of reason’ becomes a site of struggle that generates the crisis of knowledge between the ontologized Being and the de-ontologized (negated) Being in terms of the criteria for ownership of the process of knowledge

production. In such a rational ‘space of reason,’ only one system of bifurcated logic exists, and this is premised on the division between the *knowing subject* (rational Being) and the *unknowing subject* (irrational Being). What this implies is that the philosophical foundations of rationality in western philosophical praxis has serious ontological implications for the conception of the Black subject in relation to knowledge or knowing.

In *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation*, Calvin Warren explores how knowledge within western philosophical praxis such as “ontometaphysics” characterizes Blackness as an “incarnation of nothing that a metaphysical world tries to eradicate. Black [Being] is invented [and] precisely exists for this function ontologically; this is the ontological labor that the [Black] must perform in an antiblack world.”¹ In this imaginary, the Black subject is not able to be considered as knowledgeable because the ontological status of Being has already been negated or erased. This is because both ontological and epistemological categories mutually reinforce each other in terms of making sense of the world; especially in terms of describing what it means *to be* in the world and what it means *to know* that one is the world. Being in the world necessitates knowing in the world—in an ontoepistemological loop that feeds on each other, in the process of making meaning in the world. Thus, the negated Black being cannot participate in this ontoepistemological loop that is being described here because the characterization we get from this discussion of Being in the world does not extend the criteria of Being but non-Being to Blackness. So, it becomes a philosophical and conceptual impossibility to imagine an alternate universe where Blackness enters into the discussions of knowledge acquisitions using this hegemonic western frame of thinking that Warren refers to as “ontometaphysics.” Warren also exposes the need, within such hegemonic system, to construct or conjure a knowledgeably deformed other, which aims at creating systems of logical

bifurcations that represents everything good about the ontologized Being while exposing the assumptive weaknesses of the negated Being, in an antiblack world. In this instance, “an antiblack world desires to obliterate black nothing—nothing as the limitation of its dominance—so that its schematization, calculation, and scientific practices are met unchecked by this terrifying hole, nothing.”²

The present hegemonic order of knowledge is focused on the erasure of Blackness from the discourse of knowledge. This erasure of Blackness from the discourse of knowledge is also an erasure of the humanity of the Black subject. Part of what it means *to know* is connected to the question of Being. That is, to be human, is to be able to avow systems of thought, consciously project categories into the world, and to demonstrate epistemic authority over naming what is and what is not. It follows from this line of reasoning that if the Black subject does not feature in the imaginations of what it means to possess such power to avow systems of knowledge, the humanity of the Black subject is considered deficient in some form—or deformed in this imaginary. In Eurocentric/Anglo-American circles, the discourse of knowledge, in regard to concepts such as agency, subjectivity, and rationality are ascribed to whiteness. As Cecil Foster argues in *Blackness and Modernity*, the dominant ethos of western philosophical praxis has been built on claims to subjective knowledge, as enlightenment philosophers like Kant, Hegel, and Marx argue.

Such ideological constructions aim to produce self-consciousness as this enables a subject to fully know what she or he is capable of doing and of becoming. Limits and boundaries must be known, and a free subject would be able to desire and achieve what can rationally be expected, given the limits.³ The underside of this is that it places the Black subject outside of the limit of knowledge based on the over-emphasis on bodily markers of identity and Being rather

than functions of the mind that the Eurocentric “abstracted” subject or *ego* enjoys. In other words, the physical or bodily features of the Black subject such as skin coloration and other pseudo-scientific, physiological projections, obstructs any considerations that may envision Blackness with knowledge. The ontological erasure of Blackness is not only abstract but also material. Such that the Black subject is seen as the negative pathology, the Other who is put outside the margins of the community of life.⁴ The critical question to raise here concerns how, in the absence of genuine and non-refutable knowledge, did Blackness become associated in this ideological framework, primarily with somatic features, to the point where the three other categories—the idealistic, rational, and ontological status—have been reduced to somatic as a purported way of knowing with certainty.⁵

In *On Reason: Rationality in a World of Cultural Conflict and Racism*, Emmanuel Eze considers the reduction of the Black subject, to somatic or bodily features through the over-emphasis on “reason” as an attempt to glorify the “heroism” of interventions of western scientific methods in grappling with the pathologies often generated through a race-based lens. By implication, all the pharmacological and ideological interventions developed to grapple with such deformations, becomes fundamentally tainted since they are developed through negative racial stereotypes. This is how knowledge construction works with the deformation of Blackness through the over-emphasis on bodily makers, in a white supremacist society. It is the construction of a state of existence that perpetually seeks to categorize Black and Brown bodies as social problems rather than as knowledge subjects. In such a society, Eze argues, the Black body is both a sign and site of experience of the racially Other, such that it is considered a legitimate practice of heroic medicine to “treat” the Blackness—the ontological and biological harbinger of negative pathologies. After all, to a racialized mind or philosophical standpoint

(such as western epistemology), the connection between the moral problem of social ills and other negative realities is easily attributable to the existence of, literally Black and Brown bodies of humanity.⁶ This exposes the grounds for anti-Blackness or for pathologizing Blackness in contemporary epistemological discourse. This phenomenon is what Calvin Warren, in “Black Nihilism and the Politics of Hope,” describes as anti-black epistemology. For Warren, “anti-black Epistemology is somewhat schizophrenic in its aim: it at once posits [B]lackness as an anti-grammatical entity—paradoxically, a non-foundation-foundation that provides the condition of possibility for its existence—and at the same time, and in stunning contradiction, it forces a translation of this anti-grammar into a system of understanding that is designed to [exclude] it.”⁷ This characterization of dominant epistemology that favors anti-Black systematization is inherently violent—this violence consists in the attempt to advance a discursive and linguistic unification—to establish a unifying ground of language or reason—which places Blackness outside of the customary lexis of life and culture, as well as outside of the domain of avowal of epistemic states in the world.

The over-emphasis on bodily markers of the Black subject in the discourse of knowledge can also be considered as a form of both epistemic violence and the violence of objectification that may lead to the violation of the integrity of the Black body. The objectification of the Black body raises the issue of Black invisibility and hypervisibility as modes of further erasure of the integrity of the Black body. The Black body as objectified also raises issues around the constitutive and constructive semiotic, material, and sociopolitical processes that hail and fix the white body as normative, thus reinforcing the importance of the social “ontological space white ego genesis [and maintenance] that requires the evading of the humanity of Black people.”⁸ What is being explored in the foregoing, is the notion that the undermining of the humanity of Black

people in Eurocentric/Anglo-American circles, was achieved through empirical and non-empirical arguments—through embodied and disembodied framing of the Black subject as ontologically defective and incapable of possessing knowledge.

In *The World and Africa*, DuBois describes this tendency to merely glorify the humanity of Europeans through the denigration of people of non-European descent in the study of the history of human civilization as the greatest tragedy of the world, especially in the later parts of the 19th, as well as the earlier periods of the 20th century. As DuBois argues, this tragedy that led to the collapse of Europe in the early twentieth century, ought to be astounding because of the boundless faith which was hitherto accorded to European civilization. This is the long-held belief, held without argument or reflection that the cultural status of people of Europe and North America represented not only the best civilization which the world had ever known but also a goal of human effort destined to go on from triumph to triumph until the perfect accomplishment was reached.⁹ By implication, this assumption of the supremacy of European civilization over and above that of non-European civilizations further reinforced the contemporary binaries that are drawn between knowledge systems produced within the Eurocentric cultural praxis and those that are produced “outside” of this system. In the context of this discussion, Blackness is eschewed from the considerations of the historical-genealogical documentation of ideas and intellectual schemes because of the hegemonic centering of what it means to be “human” and “civilized,” when simultaneously considered, does not include the Black subject or Black folks. This notion of exclusion of Blackness from history (intellectual or cultural history), was generally accepted as common and indubitable knowledge in the 19th century. However, Du Bois rubbished this notion of exclusion of Black folks from historical considerations of human civilization, by arguing that though, it is almost universally assumed that history can be truly

written without reference to Negroid [Black] peoples, this assumption is scientifically unsound and also dangerous for logical social conclusions.¹⁰ In what follows, I explore this idea of the Black subject as defective or deformed, within the Eurocentric regime of knowledge as having its roots in 18th/19th century race theory and ethnology.

The Deformation of Blackness: Biological Racism as Social Epistemology in 18th and 19th Century Race Theory/Ethnology

The predominant social epistemologies developed in the context of 18th/19th century race theory and ethnology by American theorists, ethnologists, anthropologists, and scientists deployed a “master narrative” that caricatured Blackness as an unformed or deformed category of Being. That is, the collective epistemologies formed in this period about Black people were aimed at the denial of Black intellectual gifts or abilities as well as the denial of Black humanity. Ethnology was regarded as the eminent science in American culture during this period because it created a classification or categories of the human and established a hierarchy among the races of men through an over-emphasis on physiological or anatomical features as well as the deducing of personality traits, and the measurement of intellectual abilities through cranial information. For instance, in an essay published in the *Transactions of Ethnological Society of London* of 1865, “Psychological Differences of the Races of Men,” Robert Dunn argues that because the anterior lobe of the brain in the Negro [Blacks] and that of the European is large, in proportion to the middle lobe, Black folks are intellectually and morally inferior to the European. He affirms that:

Both in the Negro and the Indian, the cerebral hemispheres are pointed and narrow in front; and their transverse convolutions of the frontal lobes are remarkably conspicuous for the simplicity and regularity of their arrangement, and for the perfect symmetry which they exhibit on both of the hemispheres when contrasted with the complexity, irregularity, and unsymmetrical character which is presented on the brain of the European. Such cerebral differences, in my opinion, warrant, as a legitimate inference, that alike in the Negro and the Indian, the nervous apparatus of the perceptive and intellectual consciousness falls short

of that fulness, elaboration, and complexity of his manifestations, both intellectually and morally.¹¹

What we see from Dunn's arguments is the systematic attempt to perfect the argument for the inferiorization of the so-called "inferior races" (Negro/Black and Indian) through scientific conjurations built from cranial measurements in 19th-century ethnology. Melissa Stein expands on this in "Races of Men: Ethnology in Antebellum America" arguing that this systematic inferiorization that had serious racial and masculinist implications since, "in the antebellum period, when racial scientists spoke of a race or races, they usually meant men specifically, although that was not always immediately apparent. Much of the literature in the field was written in what psychologists and linguists refer to as the "masculine generic"—that is, "man" and "mankind" to mean all of humankind."¹² What this means is that ethnology's development as a field was one in which masculinity was simultaneously central and implicit, even though most of the discussions about the hierarchy of Being was conceived from the standpoint of the white-black binary. Such that, "in the black-and-white world of antebellum ethnology, the white race was normative whereas the [B]lack race was scrutinized for evidence of difference and deviance."¹³

Ethnology, as understood by nineteenth-century anthropologists, limited its investigations to the rudimentary beginnings of human society. Essentially, ethnology was the comparative and developmental study of social man and his culture. Concerning himself with the science of culture, the ethnologist enumerated the conditions and modes of existence of specific nonwestern peoples and only touched tangentially upon the contemporary problems of western life.¹⁴ The work by Buckner H. P. Ariel, *The Negro: What Is His Ethnological Status?* is a good example of a document that shows how ethnologists focused their racializing science on characterizing the modes of existence of nonwestern peoples. In this work, Ariel's presented a defense of the

ontological distinctions between the white race and the Black race (the two races of men existing on earth), which he believes were largely manifested in the physiological distinctions that are more accessible to “empirical” investigations and measurable “scientific” conclusions. In Ariel’s description, ethnologically speaking, the prominent characteristics and differences of these two races are as we now find them—the white race have long, straight hair, high foreheads, high noses, thin lips, and white skins: the olive and sunburnt color, where the other characteristics are found, belong equally to the white race. The negro or black race, are woolly or kinky-headed, low foreheads, flat noses, thick-lipped, and have Black skin.¹⁵

Ariel eventually moved from the presentation of arguments of physiological differences between the Black and the white race to construct an argument for the superiority of the white race is by divine design in his exegetical musings.¹⁶ Ariel argued that God in the creating of Adam, to be the head of creation, intended to distinguish, and did distinguish him with eminent grandeur and notableness in his creation, over and above everything else that had preceded it. But it is believed that when creating the negro and other beasts and animals, he made them male and female—each out of the ground. Not so with Adam and his female, for God expressly tells us that he made Adam’s wife out of himself, thus securing the unity of immortality *in his race alone*, and hence he called their name Adam, not *man*. The Black man was the background of the picture, to show the white man to the world, in his dominion over the earth, as the darkness was the background of the picture of creation, before and over which light, *God’s light*, should forever be seen.¹⁷ What we see from assumptions imbued in Ariel’s writings (and similar writings or teachings of this kind) in the 18th and 19th centuries in the United States, are the roots or foundations of the deformation of Blackness. For instance, it was during this same period that the doctrine of the curse of Ham was developed from biblical-old testament exegesis.

The curse of Ham (also called the curse of Canaan) refers to the curse that Ham's father, Noah placed upon Ham's youngest son, Canaan after Ham saw his father's nakedness because of drunkenness in Noah's tent. The "curse of Ham" had been used by some members of Abrahamic religions to justify racism and the enslavement of people of African ancestry, who were believed to be descendants of Ham.¹⁸ They were often called *Hamites* and were believed to have descended through Canaan or his older brothers. This racist doctrine was widely held during the eighteenth to twentieth centuries.

These types of thinking were pervasive during the antebellum period and were generally held as socially formulated truths, acceptable knowledge that was used to shape the regimes of rewards and punishment within society as well as distinguishing the domain of the human. It is interesting to note that Ariel's allusion to "the ground" as the source of Blackness—was equated with something of low-status, in this instance, lower Being. That is, the divine program for the creation of Being in the world, does not include the idea of an equal ontological grounding to all of God's creation—not even the creation of humans. Rather, "the ground" in Ariel's ethnological musings was used as both a literal and metaphoric device for subjection, subjugation, and sub-parity. The metaphoric allusion is where Blackness is relegated to the domain of the non-human through the linkage of Blackness to darkness. Darkness, here, is the place where all immoralities, illogicalities, ill-will, illusions, and every other form of social ills were projected as the distinguishing features of Blackness. It is also the place where the ideals held in high esteem in society, such as being knowledgeable, sociable, amiable, and teachable was deemed as being outside of the realm of Blackness. This was the ultimate aim of the deformation of Blackness within the biological racism developed in 19th-century ethnology.

Samuel George Morton, a highly regarded American paleontologist and medical director, who was one of the leaders of ethnology in the 19th century, compiled a “scientific” manuscript published in 1855 entitled, *Types of Mankind or Ethnological Researches*, where he argued based on data or cranial information collected from 1656 of mostly human skulls, that Black people are biologically inferior to Europeans.¹⁹ This work was praised for containing executed lithographic plates of numerous crania, of natural size, and presenting a highly regarded specimen of American art. The letter-press includes accurate measurements of the crania, especially of their interior capacity; the latter being made by a plan peculiar to the Morton, and enabling him to estimate with precision the relative amount of brain in various races.²⁰ Even though Morton specifically stated that a large part of the skulls he collected for his research were from dead birds and reptiles, his conclusions about the inferiority of Blacks, believed to have been deduced from such cranial data was not rendered invalid. It was highly praised as one of the most sophisticated scientific (ethnological) studies on the inequality of the human races. Morton’s studied was not discredited because it was in alignment with the social epistemologies and scientific assumptions in antebellum America.

The work of Morton tremendously contributed to shaping the nature of collective knowledge, including common sense, consensus, and common group, communal and impersonal knowledge within the context of 19th century ethnological theory. But it is important to mention that, for quite some time, even before the late 1830s, some naturalist and social biologists believed that brain size correlated with intelligence and that Blacks had smaller brains and hence lesser intellect than whites.²¹ In the late 1830s and the 1840s, craniology became dramatically more important, with skull size and capacity seen to determine species or at least very long-term racial entities. Morton and his cohorts such as Blumenbach and Chamberlain, using craniological

data-set, and somatic measurements as the basis for drawing “scientific” assumptions, would go on and report that on average, Caucasians had always had, even since Egyptian times, significantly larger brains than nonwhites. Morton’s *Crania Americana*, published in 1839, and particularly *Crania Aegyptiaca*, published in 1844, were the foundational texts of an American scientific movement arising around Morton in the late 1840s.²² For instance, in *Crania Americana*, Morton argues that the average European brain runs from 3lbs.20z. to 4 lbs.6 oz.; while the average of Negro [Black] brain rises to only 3lbs.5oz. short of the highest average for the European.²³ So the conclusion he drew from this was that “the inferiority²⁴ of the Negro [Black] brain in size, is self-evident from these dimensions.”²⁵

At the time of its production, this work on biological racism was hailed as the most extensive and valuable contribution to the natural history of man, which has yet appeared on the American continent and anticipate for it a cordial reception by scientific men, not only in the United States but in Europe. It became the socially accepted episteme in regard to the determination of what kinds of humans can possess the knowledge and can demonstrate intellectual abilities. It also became the widely accepted view of the differences between human personality traits and other natural tendencies. Houston Stewart Chamberlain, another prominent ethnologist would advance the thoughts of Morton and his fellow race theorists, at the turn of the century, to argue that other racial groups are inferior to the white race which makes it impossible for them to learn the ways of or assimilate into western culture. In his seminal work entitled *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, Chamberlain argued that inferior races such as the Aryan Indian, with material limited knowledge and inadequately developed civilization, possesses a titanic culture of eternal importance; the Chinaman, with a detailed knowledge of gigantic dimensions and an over-refined, feverishly active civilization, possesses no culture at all.

Just as white Americans have failed after three centuries to impart knowledge to the Negro [Blacks] or to civilize the American Indian, so they shall fail in the endeavor to graft culture upon the China man.²⁶ Chamberlain's prejudiced analysis of European culture that accords the greatness and creativity of Europe to Western Aryan peoples but characterizes the Jewish as having a negative influence on European civilization, greatly influenced Hitler. Chamberlain's theories owed much to the writings of Joseph Arthur, Comte de Gobineau, who was the first to claim to prove the superiority of the "Nordic" race or Teutonic peoples.²⁷ This postulation by Chamberlain emphasizes a new system of thinking, at the turn of the century, that focuses more on the distinction between personality types or the typologies of human personalities as a way of delineating human progress, as well as hierarchical structures of what it means to be human. Since the very idea of the ethnological theories developed by white scientists in the 19th century was aimed at erasing non-white peoples from the domain of the human, it follows that the concept of human progress, during this period was primarily restricted to European and Anglo-American cultural matrix.

This biological racism that was developed within the context of 19th-century race-theory in America or ethnology was influenced by the racism already present in the works of modern philosophers like Locke, Hume, and Kant. It was the vestige of an epistemological system that infers from observable physiological features that human uniqueness resides primarily in the brain/mind.²⁸ In *The Mismeasure of Man*, Stephen Jay Gould describes this phenomenon as the upshot on social Darwinism. He argues that the concept of evolution transformed human thought during the nineteenth century because nearly every question in the life sciences was reformulated in its light. No idea was ever more widely used, or misused ("social Darwinism" as an evolutionary rationale for the inevitability of poverty, for example). Both creationists and

evolutionists could exploit the data of brain size to make their invalid and invidious distinctions among groups.²⁹ What Gould mentions here concerning the invidious distinctions among groups is instructive because the devious history of American enslavement of Blacks was justified within a culture that espouses “Christian values” using such “false” scientific ethnological theories.

The exploration of how the dominant racializing social epistemologies in “modern philosophy,” influenced the biological racism in the 18th and 19th centuries is important in this chapter because it exposes the set of concepts that were used to rationalize and helped to justify the value system upon which the idea of racial inferiority rested in American thought. The idea of racial inferiority as the upshot of this racist or racializing science—the science of ethnology and paleontology—was to make concretized conclusions about the inferiority and superiority of the races in the 18th/19th centuries that was primarily geared towards the deformation of Blackness. During this period, the notion of “reason” became the hallmark of intelligibility and the ultimate consideration for membership or classification into the human community. In this regard, “reason” was not considered as an innate human attribute that is possessed by “all” humans; rather, it was considered as a socially and ontologically ascribed attribute belonging primarily to those who have European cultural heritage and nothing more. In other words, the idea of “reason” was not regarded as something that all humans innately possess, rather, it was designed as something to be allotted based on group associations. So, “reason” or “reasonability” became the foundational precept in social epistemology, by which non-white individuals or subjects were removed or erased from the domain of knowledge as well as the domain of Being.

This idea of distinguishing between inferior and superior human beings based on reason or reasonability was greatly emphasized in “modern philosophy.” Modern philosophers

prominently argued that because there are deep connections between “reason” and self-knowledge, only white subjects can be regarded as ‘reasonable’ humans. This is the same skewed philosophical orientation that flourished in the biological racism of 19th-century social epistemology. The idea of biological racism and the theory of the hierarchy of Being as it connects to the distinction between inferior and superior races, in terms of the display of the human quality of rationality, featured prominently in the writings of philosophers in the enlightenment period. Modern philosophy, in line with the manifest racism in western sciences of the human and social epistemologies, projected “rationality” as the hallmark of intellectual superiority while restricting this to white/caucasian subjects alone. For instance, David Hume (1711-1776), the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher was among the first noted authors to profess the polygenic theory of racism. He did so as part of his “inductive” naturalistic philosophy or experimental philosophy. Hume, who is considered among the most important figures in the history of western philosophy and the Scottish Enlightenment, advocated the separate creation and innate inferiority of nonwhite peoples.³⁰ In his *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* published in 1758, Hume argued thus:

“I am apt to suspect the negroes, and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturers amongst them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the rudest and barbarous of the whites, such as the ancient GERMAN, the present TARTARS, have still something eminent about them, in their valor, form of government, or some other particular. Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction betwixt these breeds of men. Not to mention our colonies, there are NEGROE slaves dispersed all over EUROPE, of which none ever discovered any symptom of ingenuity; tho’ low people, without education, will start up amongst us, they talk of one negro as a man of parts and learning; but ‘is likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments, like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly.³¹”

Apart from the fact that Hume's expressed thoughts here are virulently racist, it anticipates the same arguments about the assumed inferiority of non-whites using markers of racial hierarchy like "skin complexion," "artistic or literary productions," and other physiological markers, that 19th-century race theorists, philosophers, and naturalists were making. When Hume talks about education, he thinks of it as inextricably tied to the ability to reason. So, he sees education, or lack of it thereof, as a marker of racial superiority or inferiority, between whites and non-white peoples. In this regard, he is signifying "reason" as the ultimate marker for what it means to be human. Following in Hume's footsteps but adding and enveloping similar racist ideas into a whole system of philosophical thought, Immanuel Kant essentially created a racist anthropology based on skin color. Kant, who is acknowledged as one of the most influential philosophers of Enlightenment, is also regarded as the father of the modern concept of race and scientific racism.³² Kant's theory of race corresponded to intellectual ability and limitation. He included the typical color-coded races of Europe, Asia, Africa, and Native America, differentiated by their degree of innate talent. In Kant's theory, the "pure" nature of the white race guarantees its rational and moral order, which is why they are in the highest position of all creatures, followed by yellow, Black, and then red peoples. Nonwhites cannot exhibit reason and rational moral perfectibility through education.³³

J. C. Lavater, the acknowledged Physiognomist drew from the "philosophical" and anthropological teachings of Kant (which he regarded as excellent), in regard to the distinctions of the races of men, to construct a discourse of difference, where non-Europeans (including Blacks), were deemed to be inferior to Europeans.³⁴ Blackness, in the manner J.C. Lavater's Kant-inspired imagination conceives of it, is nothing but a collection of odious sensuous or bodily reactions and characterizations. The restriction of Blackness to this realm, suggests a

limitation of Blackness to the domain of the non-rational and unintelligent which is made apparent in Lavater's assertion that "[t]he Guinea negroes are extremely limited in their capacities. Many of them appear to be wholly stupid; or, never capable of counting more than three, remain in a thoughtless state if not acted upon, and have no memory."³⁵ Basically, in his writings, Lavater invokes Kant as one of the intellectual sources for his thoughts to achieve two ends. The first is aimed at maintaining the unity of the conclusions drawn in the 18th century and reinforced in 19th-century ethnology that reduces Blackness to somatic features and the second is geared towards the reinforcement of the racial hierarchy between the white race and other races in the world through an overemphasis on physiological differences construed in physiognomic terms as "defects." For instance, in *Physiognomy*, Lavater argues that "the surplus of the ferruginous or iron particles, which have lately been discovered to exist in the blood of man, and which, by the evaporation of the phosphoric acidities, of which all negroes smell so strong, being cast upon the retiform membrane, occasions the Blackness which appears through the cuticle."³⁶ These types of postulations from Lavater were considered scientific, and this gave them some form of credence as believable grounds for truth. Since, *a la* Lavater, whenever truth or knowledge is explained by fixed principles, it becomes scientific, so far as it can be imparted by words, lines, rules, and definitions. It is not apodictic or analytic, but synthetic.³⁷ Thus, Blackness was reduced to "sensuousness" not "analyticity" or *reason* in this Eurocentric schema.

Kant was one of the philosophers whose writings significantly shaped the enlightenment³⁸ period, which later became known as "the age of reason"—for its apparent emphasis on the value of reason in shaping human existence. During this period, "reason" was considered as the principal essence of human existence, albeit exclusive to beings. So, the notion of rationality, in this period, was not aimed at an inclusive humanism, it was aimed at divining

the notion of exclusive humanism where all non-whites can be confined outside the classification of the human. In “The Struggle to Define and Reinvent Whiteness,” Joe Kincheloe argues that the Enlightenment’s idea of the reason was so hegemonic that it seeks to construct Europeans Beings/humans as entities that transcend the geo-spatial notion of time and space—and grounds itself as the foundational precept for knowing the world as it is. Joe Kincheloe argues that:

A dominant impulse of whiteness took shape around the European Enlightenment's notion of rationality with its privileged construction of a transcendental white, male, rational subject who operated at the recesses of power while concurrently giving every indication that he escaped the confines of time and space. In this context whiteness was naturalized as a universal entity that operated as more than a mere ethnic positionality emerging from a particular time, the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and a particular space, Western Europe. Reason in this historical configuration is whitened and human nature itself is grounded upon this reasoning capacity. Lost in the defining process is the socially constructed nature of reason itself, not to mention its emergence as a signifier of whiteness. Thus, in its rationalistic womb whiteness begins to establish itself as a norm that represents an authoritative, delimited, and hierarchical mode of thought.³⁹

Perhaps, one of the most instructive assertions from the quote above is this: “[r]eason in this historical configuration is whitened and human nature itself is grounded upon this reasoning capacity.”⁴⁰ In other words, the ability to reason is only ascribed to humans if they belong to the white racial group—it is not even a function of biology or science per se—rather, it is a function of what has been socially accepted as the normative principle behind the ascription of knowledge. However, it does not stop at affirming the agency, knowability, and humanity of those who belong to this group associations; it goes further to lay this down as the foundational qualitative yardstick for measuring humanity as a whole. This is what Kincheloe meant by the term “socially constructed nature of reason;” it is the same phenomenon I have regarded here as a form of social epistemology. A social epistemology that utilizes the pre-set mechanism of “reason” or “reasonability” as the ultimate measure of what it means to be human and what it

means to be something else—not-human, Other, and other fictional categories that can be imagined within this system of thought.

Following this diagnosis, it becomes apparent how the genius of the first Black poet, Phillis Wheatley, in the 18th century was denied based on reason—because Wheatley was Black, she could not possibly participate in the social order of knowledge that acknowledges only white subjects as worthy epistemic agents. Wheatley, who was purchased as a very young slave, developed her literary genius at a time when the majority of Black Americans in the United States were held in bondage. Since, this was also a period where, white law and social practice, prohibits slaves from learning to read and write, it is a sign of genius that Wheatley was able to cultivate the skill of writing, even in such difficult circumstances. Possessing at first no materials, her genius improvised some for the occasion. Not being supplied with pen and paper, she found ever-ready substitutes in a piece of chalk or charcoal and brick wall. In this and other ways indicating the unusual ability, much attention was directed to her from Wheatley household. However, that family soon learned that instead of obtaining a spirit born to serve, there had come among them a spirit born to create. In her twelfth year Phillis was able to carry on an extensive correspondence on the most important and interesting topics of the day with many of the wisest and most learned in Boston and London.⁴¹ Wheatley's genius was widely acclaimed because the predominant belief in 19th-century colonial America was that Blacks were incapable of displaying the talents of the reason that comes with such great intellectual achievements. This made Wheatley attract a different kind of Boston's audience—the powerful kind that subjected her to a trial and oral examination.⁴²

Phillis Wheatley's publication of her book of poetry enunciated doubts about the true authorship of this text, so much so, that her slave master was summoned to bring her to a trial. In

his very insightful work on this issue published as a monograph titled, *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley: America's First Black Poet and Her Encounters with the Founding Fathers*, Henry Louis Gates Jr., argues that the panel of the most respectable characters in Boston that was assembled had the primary task of verifying the authorship of her poems and to answer a much larger question: was a Negro capable of producing literature?⁴³ To put this question somewhat differently: Is a Black person capable of exhibiting the genius of knowledge production in literature? This question probes not only the genius of Wheatley in producing masterful literary pieces, but it also raises a deeper inquiry about whether any member of the Black race could possess such knowledge and intellectual abilities to write a book of poetry. Gates' assessment here is very revealing because it depicts why Wheatley's oral examination was so important—especially noting that, if she had indeed written her poems, then this would demonstrate that Africans were human beings and should be liberated from slavery. If, on the other hand, she had not written, or could not write her poems, or if indeed she was like a parrot who speaks a few words plainly, then that would be another matter entirely. Essentially, she was auditioning for the entire humanity of the entire African people.⁴⁴

Similarly, the scathing criticisms that Thomas Jefferson leveled against the genius of Phillis Wheatley was also aimed at undermining her humanity as well as the maintenance of the socially accepted belief that Blacks were intellectually inferior to whites. Jefferson believed that even though Africans have human souls, they merely lack the intellectual endowments of other races.⁴⁵ For instance in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson argued that when Blacks are compared to whites “by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me that in memory they are equal to whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid: and that in imagination

they are dull, tasteless and anomalous.”⁴⁶ What he is echoing here is the same stereotypical views that were predominant in the 18th and 19th-century race theory in America. He made further allusions to biological racism in this text by advancing the view that physiological differences between whites and Blacks in terms of skin pigmentation, hair, and symmetry of form, marks the circumstance of superior beauty of whites as well as intellectual superiority.

So, his denigration of the intellectual genius of Phillis Wheatley was consistent with his espoused view of a world where intellectual acumen can only be demonstrated by members of the white race. He would go on to argue in *Notes on the State of Virginia* that “religion indeed has produced a Phyllis Whatley [sic.]; but it could not produce poetry. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism.”⁴⁷ Even though Wheatley had been subjected to the most rigorous forms of vetting to confirm that she was truly the author of the numerous poems that were published under her name, Jefferson refused to acknowledge her genius and her epistemic accomplishments. Jefferson’s denial of Phillis Wheatley’s genius and knowledge amounts to a denial of her humanity as well as the denial of that of any Black person possessing such qualities that is mainly “reserved” for whites. This infelicitous remark by Jefferson prompted a strong counterargument from Dr. Samuel Stanhope, who was himself a slave owner like Jefferson. Dr. Samuel Stanhope Smith in his “Essay on the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species,” (News Brunswick, 1810), says in answer to Jefferson’s critique of Wheatley, “the poems of Phillis Wheatley, a poor African slave, taught to read by the indulgent piety of her master are spoken of with infinite contempt. But I will demand of Mr. Jefferson or any other man who is acquainted with American planters, how many of those masters could have written poems equal to those of Phillis Wheatley?”⁴⁸

Despite the many criticisms leveled against the scholarship of Phillis Wheatley, she became an accomplished and celebrated Black writer and orator who traveled between Great Britain and the United States delivering solicited speeches, poems, and oratory. In one of her speaking engagements in Britain where she delivered one of her poems to the University of Cambridge, in New England (1767); she had this to say about America:

While an intrinsic ardor prompts to write,
The muses promise to assist my pen;
'Twas not long since I left my native shore
The land of errors, and Egyptian gloom⁴⁹

In this poem, Wheatley recognizes the negative import of slavery of her sojourn in the new world (the land of errors), especially navigating the melancholic experiences she had as Black woman demonstrating intellectual abilities that were believed to be a prerogative of white men. In this sense, she imagines her Blackness as something trapped in a metaphoric notion of “Egyptian gloom.” Which can also allude to the demonization of Blackness in 18th-19th century ethnological musings. Despite all of such inhibitions, Wheatley was able to display her genius through her many writings.

In a sense, Wheatley’s expressed literary and intellectual genius problematizes the virulent, racist, and sociological lens through which Blacks or Blackness was caricatured in 18th and 19th centuries ethnological science. The example of Wheatley further buttresses how the Black subject was excluded from the system of rationality that would later become valorized in modern philosophy, especially in the Enlightenment period—a colonial context in which white subjects would be increasingly framed, in the encounter with non-whites, in rationalistic terms—such that whiteness would be used to represent orderliness, rationality, and self-control while non-whiteness would be used to represent chaos, irrationality, violence, and the breakdown of

self-regulation. In this context, rationality emerged as the conceptual base around which civilization and savagery could be delineated.⁵⁰

The idea of rationality in this ideological system, is focused more on the ordering of the world in terms of determining how different subjective experiences are accounted for as either “foundational” or “othered.” In *Contempt and Pity* Daryl M. Scott argues that American colonialists in the antebellum era advocated the idea that Blacks were incapable of being assimilated into American or “advanced” civilization because they fundamentally lack the capacity for rational inquiry. Such arguments were prevalent among the racial conservatives, who operated primarily from within a biological framework and argued for the innate inferiority of people of African descent. The African’s biological make-up, it was argued, limited his or her ability to create or be assimilated into an advanced civilization.⁵¹ What Scott highlights here touches on two important issues that are crucial to the discourse in this chapter. The first has to do with the authority over knowledge and how that fundamentally determines how subjectivities are constructed and how the limits of the human are demarcated. The second concerns the *telos* of the arguments about the innate inferiority of Blacks as dualistic forms of power-play that creates a hierarchy of human experience as well as the construction of a dominant or hegemonic narrative that shapes the worldview of a culture that possesses “advanced civilization.” But both sides of the arguments have one thing in common and that is, the erasure of the Black subject from the domain of knowledge, especially the authority over knowledge.⁵²

What this historical exegesis shows is that epistemology, as developed within the western philosophical canon has never been about the pursuit of truth as such, in a disembodied fashion. Rather, it has been more about constructing a social system of knowledge or dialogical formation, often backed by the authority of science, that captures the ruminations of the

western/European man/human/Being, as well as the attributions of the functions of the mind for the Being as such. Thus, the idea of ‘space of reason’ historically constructed to eschew Blackness from the domain of knowledge and make it impossible to negotiate the conditions of lividity for Black folks. It reveals how the anthropological assumptions, functional and structural arguments made by European social biologists, ethnologists, and paleontologists within this cultural praxis informed the epistemological preoccupation of philosophers and how the ‘space of reason’ was constructed as a site for humanism and social power. So, it is not the attributes of the mind that takes preeminence in the questions about what can be known, but essentially who has the power to determine *who* can know *what* can be known. It is about epistemic power—the power to affirm as well as the power to negate. Western anthropologists abrogated boundless epistemic power to construct “scientific” theories to “prove” that Blacks cannot develop rational faculty or intellectual competence to grasp the abstract realities of nature and went as far as advancing such as the ultimate social reality or truth. Even though most of such conclusions or myths were drawn out of sheer imaginative, fictitious, and unfounded assumptions where Black people are often constructed as “unfortunate” victims of the knowledge acquisition process or some other forms of epistemic discrimination.

This historical exegesis on the racial origins of social epistemology explains why it is unreasonable to make inquisitions under this Eurocentric regime of knowledge. The ultimate objective of the biological racism that was peddled as social epistemology in the 18th and 19th centuries was to ensure the deformation of Blackness. It gave birth to the generally held belief of Black inferiority based on the criteria of “reason” which was used to ultimately determine those, to whom the gift of the intellect and the classification of the “human” would be either denied or extended to. Today, in academic circles, a commonly expressed view on the racial origins of

knowledge discourse is one that holds that even though 19th-century race theory was primarily focused on destroying Blackness, through the force of sheer intellectual/epistemic violence, such intellectual history/legacy ought to be “sanitized” to accommodate previously excluded communities, such as Blacks. This position reeks of intellectual arrogance because it presupposes that those western hegemonic ideas, theories, and theoretical assumptions should be the “privileged” lens or avenue through which Blackness should be framed in the pursuit of knowledge. It is also an extension of the logic of the epistemic violence that seeks to propagate the erasure of Blackness from the discourse of knowledge.

Thus, this work conceives of the possibility of imagining a world where discussion on the nature, structure, and limits of Black knowledge, does not have to rely on epistemic systems that perpetually shut-out Blackness from the considerations on knowledge attribution. In what follows, I highlight how the discourse of knowledge in contemporary epistemology perpetuates the erasure of Blackness.

On Whose Epistemic Authority? The Erasure of the Black Subject from the Discourse of Knowledge in Contemporary Epistemology

...there is but one coward on earth, and that is the coward that dare not know.
W.E.B. DuBois, 1898

This section specifically examines how Blackness has been erased from the discussions about epistemic authority in contemporary discourse in procedural/analytic epistemology. Contemporary discourse in procedural/analytic epistemology situates the question of epistemic authority within the context of power—the power to avow epistemic categories including states in the world. Given this notion of epistemic authority, what does it then mean to assert that one has authority over another? Or what role does the notion of authority play in knowledge attribution? The most influential account of authority—Joseph Raz’s service conception — an

account of the *role* of authority, provides us with a glimpse of how to answer such questions. Most philosophers hold that authority (of the practical sort) consists of a right to rule, such that subjects are obligated to obey.⁵³ But they disagree over what it takes for a person to qualify as an authority in that sense. Raz's answer is captured in the *normal justification thesis*, which says that a person has authority over another if her orders would help that person conform better to reason's requirements than she otherwise would. He also argues for the *dependence thesis*, the view that an epistemic authority's orders should be based on reasons that independently apply to those subject to them.⁵⁴ This account of authority relies heavily on the "role of reason"—the reason to follow the authority's strength of argument and reason to compel others to act, depending on the subjective directives of the authority.

But what is unstated in this characterization of epistemic authority—as the strength or role of reason—is the identity of the subject that wields such authority or power. This concealed authorial figure/subject needs to be unveiled. In "Epistemic Disobedience," Walter D. Mignolo observes that a common feature of contemporary epistemology is the quest to hide the all-powerful subject. According to Mignolo, modern epistemology (e.g. the hubris of the zero points) often manage to conceal both the figure of the detached observer, a neutral seeker of truth and created objectivity, who at the same time controls the disciplinary rules and puts himself or herself in a privileged position to evaluate and dictate.⁵⁵ Mignolo goes further to argue that because of the interfacing of racism and epistemology—where white subjects were deemed to be rational and non-whites are deemed to be irrational, the assumption that the knowing subject in the epistemological discourse is transparent, disincorporated from the known and untouched by the geo-political configuration of the world in which people are racially ranked and regions are racially configured, is untenable. This view is also made problematic by the view that from a

detached and neutral point of observation the knowing subject maps the world and its problems, classifies people and projects into what is good for them.⁵⁶ When knowledge ascription is framed in such personal or individualistic terms, it makes it possible for the so-called “rational subjects” to disavow the possibility of the so-called “irrational subjects” having any sort of knowledge.

Within contemporary epistemological discourse, epistemic authority is mainly characterized as—the exclusive privilege of the “self” or the “authorial self” whose signification is the white/European/Anglo-American subject that ascribes rationality to *itself* and establishes its authority to universally avow epistemic categories. From Hegel’s *absolute spirit* to Cartesian *ego cogito*, the historical and ontological trajectory of philosophical ideas propagates this idea of the exclusivity of “rationality.” This is the ontological side of the attribution of “reason” to the “knowing subject that is concealed in contemporary analytic epistemology. As John Agnew observes in “Know-Where,” knowledge creation and dissemination are never innocent of at least some ontological commitments, be they provincial, class, gender, identity, or something else.⁵⁷ This human subject is often characterized within this praxis as self-evident and abstracted from the body which is essential to maintain its epistemic power or “authorial dominance” even within metaphysical or transcendental realms.

Lindon Barrett in *Racial Blackness and the Discontinuity of Western Modernity* argues that this schematic where knowledge is said to consist in self-evident abstracted forms is how Blackness was systematically erased from the discourse of knowledge in western modernity because Blackness is relegated to the realm of a material agency or bodily functions. In Barrett’s view, the human subject and the human body are precisely the enabling and exclusionary inventions of the modern episteme, rather than self-evident forms of worldly agency. He argues further that the epistemic space and the disjunction between epistemes cannot be explained

through recourse to the human subject as a given and the human body as a constant. For Barrett, René Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* exemplifies this erasure of Blackness through the abstraction of forms of knowledge, in the mid-seventeenth century. Especially, the Cartesian emphasis on the human subject as that which is not a "natural" phenomenon at all, but rather the confounding, animating abstraction always ascertainable by its contradistinction to the natural, as most immediately represented by the material agency of the human body.⁵⁸ In one of his key philosophical writings, "On the Principles of Human Knowledge," Descartes articulates his emphasis on the primacy of mental properties in the process of knowledge acquisition by putting forward the following argument:

But to understand how the knowledge which we possess of our mind not only precedes that which we have of our body but is also more evident, it must be observed that it is very manifest by the natural light...that no qualities or properties pertain to nothing; and that where some are perceived there must necessarily be something or substance on which they depend. And the same light shows us that we know a thing or substance so much the better the more properties we observe in it. And we certainly observe many more qualities in our mind than in any other thing, since there is nothing that excites us to knowledge of whatever kind, which does not even much more certainly compel us to a consciousness of our thought.⁵⁹

Here, Descartes describes why he thinks the knowledge of "a knowing mind" is better than that of a "body." Thereby laying the foundation for the bifurcation between the human subject/knowing subject as an abstract entity, distinguished from the material agency of the human body within the Eurocentric discourse of knowledge.⁶⁰ This later became the marker of existential distinctions between human subjective experiences which turn out to be premised upon the binaries of 'Self' and the 'Other' where the Self is believed to possess the dominant or authorial epistemological features like intuition, rationality, basic-foundational beliefs and Other, is considered as incapable of exhibiting such distinguishing features. In *The Nature and Limits of Authority*, Richard DeGeorge provides a vivid representation of this claim when he opines that

“the general justification of epistemic authority is based on the fact that people are unequal inability, some being more capable intellectually than others.”⁶¹ Latent in this conceptual scheme described by George is the normative force and power to either avow or disavow what constitutes knowledge which initiates the idea of epistemic inequality, where the ‘Self’—the Eurocentric epistemic subject, is regarded as being more capable than ‘Others’ such as Black epistemic subjects. The labyrinth of such power constitutes the basis for the construction of truth, reality, history, and the broad categories of existence. Under this knowledge scheme, Blacks become literarily outcasts from the theory of knowledge or epistemology. Euro-American and analytic epistemologists can achieve this by de-contextualizing the framework of authorial knowledge in a bid to conceal from view, the inherent discriminatory tendencies involved in placing the power of knowledge in a disembodied and so-called “reflective rational Self.”

One fact that these analytic epistemologists try to cover up is that epistemic authority is conferred in a social context, as a result of other people’s judgment of our sincerity, reliability, trustworthiness, and objectivity. But the irony is that they think that such judgments are usually explained by an appeal to epistemic privilege: certain people are in a better position to “see” the world than are other people.⁶² This idea of epistemic authority, perhaps, finds great expression in Linda Zagzebski’s work entitled *Epistemic Authority*, where she claims that the notion of epistemic authority owes much to the notion of ‘authority of the self,’ more appropriately the rational self in the Cartesian sense. She calls it “the natural authority of the self.” What Zagzebski is suggesting is that the self should be understood as an agent in its role of taking charge of itself, correcting itself, thereby becoming a harmonious self, and hence, in some deeper way, more of a self. A self-conscious being has an executive function in virtue of being a self. This is the sense in which the self has natural authority.⁶³ Zagzebski cited Cartesian foundations

for epistemic authority without taking into cognizance the broad ramifications of the ideal of the ‘Self’ in his philosophical system. Descartes’ conception of the self does not include non-European subjects. It is a purely rationalistic framework projected towards expanding the frontiers of the Eurocentric modernity and its hegemonic conception of knowledge.

In *Authority and Estrangement*, Richard Moran develops this idea of epistemic authority as a conceptual framework where ordinary rationality is indeed bound up with specifically first-personal awareness as evidence of first-person authority. According to Moran, “when we speak of ‘authority’ in connection with first-person statements of belief and other attitudes, this idea has various dimensions. There is, of course, the epistemic authority of the report, indicating that the person making the report is in a superior position to know.”⁶⁴ It is interesting to note how this conception of authority advances the notion of privilege and power—to be considered an authority is to be in a superior position of knowledge. But who is this superior authorial agent that Moran writes about? Although Moran seems to make a Cartesian move to talk about the authorial/powerful epistemic agent who possesses epistemic authority in a disembodied manner—devoid of context, it is important to note that Moran, following Descartes, is simply referring to the European subject (and excludes the Black subject) when he talks about first-person epistemic authority. The evidence that supports this claim is found in the fact that Moran cites Kant⁶⁵ and Locke⁶⁶ as the foundation of his highly rationalized sense of epistemic authority.

If Locke and Kant become the very basis upon which we are thinking of notions of epistemic authority and the idea of rationality based on a first-personal awareness, it becomes difficult to comprehend how such a view does not erase the Black subject from being given any plausible consideration. Both Kant and Locke did not think of Black people as rational human beings who can express forms of subjectivity and ‘reason’ just like the white man. In fact, in the

Second Treatise (treatise of civil government), Locke developed a natural law theory that explained and justified slavery as a consequence of just war. Slavery was the condition of total servitude for an unjust aggressor taken captive in war. Locke presented his just-war theory, with severe restrictions, in chapters 4 and 16 “Of Slavery” and “Of Conquest,” with further glimpses in chapters 3, 7, 15, and 18, from the state of war to the dissolution of the government. He defines slavery as nothing else, but the State of War continued, between a lawful Conqueror, and a Captive. This implies that slaves, then, are captives taken in a just war.⁶⁷ Locke’s principles perfectly suited the Southern federalists who dominated the early years of the United States, especially in the antebellum period. In other words, Locke expressed clear philosophical views that justified the enslavement of Black folks, a people he thought ought not to benefit from the idea of liberty for which he is renowned. While Locke built a reputation as a champion of liberty (for white revolutionaries), he is also known for his investments in slavery; he was an investor and shareholder in the Royal African Company, which sent stolen, kidnapped and chained Black Africans to be slaves in the New World for colossal profits. Locke’s participation in designing the Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina which made way for feudal control of the Carolinas, as well as being very solicitous of the rights of the landowners to own Black humans as chattel or “property,” contradicts his notion of liberty, including the liberty to avow authorial knowledge claims—a dehumanizing view of Blackness.

Kant, on his part, is probably one of the most unworthy philosophers to cite as some kind of exemplar concerning the authority of the “Self” to avow knowledge claims, especially when the idea of the “Self” is pushed beyond the limits of European subjects. Although Kant wrote about and taught lessons in philosophical anthropology for a long time (over forty years) in Konigsberg (also known as ‘the State of the Teutonic Order’ in Eastern Germany, before 1945),

where he espouses views about the intellectual and biological inferiority of Blacks, there was no historical record of him physically seeing a Black person in his lifetime. Yet, he was considered as one of the authorities in modern philosophical anthropology and an expert on the geography of human races. In *Philosophische Anthropologie*, Kant writes that “the race of the Negroes, one could say, is completely the opposite of the [white] Americans; they are full of affect and passion, very lively, talkative and vain. Even though they lacked the capacity of reason, they can be educated but only as servants (slaves); that is if they allow themselves to be trained.”⁶⁸ It is clear from this assertion that Kant does not think of Blacks as humans who possess the ‘gift’ of reason who can make knowledge claims just like the white subject. Both Locke and Kant espouse philosophical worldviews that seek to perpetuate the erasure of Blackness. It is a view that pushes Blackness outside of the consideration of consciousness formation as well as knowledge attributions. That is, under this philosophical worldview, the power to construct who can possess knowledge or epistemic authority will always be conferred on white/European subjects.

What is at stake here is the concept of knowledge as emblematic of power and control. Essentially divining what kinds of Being would be in control of shaping the world and defining categories of those who belong to the circle of knowledge and those who will be regarded as outsiders. The centering of knowledge within the European subject puts this Being at the epicenter of power and the authority to assert what constitutes “reality” including determining who and who should not be characterized as a human being. In his essay entitled, “Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality,” Nelson Maldonado-Torres point out that the notion of power within the context of coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of being is constituted by three major elements: structure, culture, and subject. He succinctly provides the rationale for this claim as follows:

worldviews cannot be sustained by virtue of power alone. Various forms of agreement and consent need to be part of it. Basic ideas about the meaning of basic concepts and the quality of lived experience, about what constitutes valid knowledge or points of view, and about what represents political and economic order are basic areas that help define how things are conceived and accepted in any given worldview.⁶⁹

This is what makes the Eurocentric canonization of epistemic authority consistent with the broader misanthropic project of coloniality of knowledge and Being; which is how the concept of knowledge generation, in this context, is ascribed to the authorial white/European subject, for control of non-whites and control of the “space of reasons.” In his collection of essays published under the title, *Knowledge, Power, and Black Politics*, Mack C. Jones⁷⁰ emphasized this point when he avers that such knowledge is generated to serve a people’s anticipation and control needs to the extent that people or even societies construct certain epistemic positions to meet their needs, by any means necessary. Thus, by postulating his “Self” consciousness or the ‘abstracted self’ as the foundation of epistemic authority, western epistemologists by design, denies the intellectual ability and the humanity of Black people and non-whites.

Such is the crisis that is generated by the erasure of Blackness from the discourse of knowledge in contemporary epistemology. Under this categorization of the “abstracted self,” Black people will never be able to see themselves as possessing such power, control to structure the world. The fact that the European and Anglo-American philosophers put themselves in a position of knowledge avatars that can “give” the status of knowledge to intellectual productions outside of this frame, is an assumption of epistemic power. This is a self-ascribed epistemic power that leads to metaphysical determinism and epistemic discrimination such that “what counts as knowledge is determined not to the extent that it accurately depicts the set of relations in the world, but to the extent that it takes up an ideological perspective from which the world is to be viewed. This thought does not necessitate that Black thought derives from European

thinkers, but maintains that for Black thought to gain a philosophical status, it must be describable by an established European philosophical stream of thought.”⁷¹ This phenomenon being described here concerning the subordination of Black epistemological perspectives is akin to what Fanon describes as the imposition of an existential deviation on Blacks by white/European philosophical streams of thought and culture.

The hegemony within this created system of knowledge-ascription thrives on the false claim of intellectual superiority of rationalized systems of thought within Eurocentric epistemology. It is such hegemonic posturing that undergirds Cartesian *ego*-centric epistemology, Hegelian dialectic epistemology, and Kantian autonomous rationalism that is being replicated in the writings of contemporary Eurocentric philosophers. For instance, in “Epistemic Agency: Hegelian Perspective” Angelica Nuzzo highlights the connection between Kant and Hegel, especially in terms of the ‘transcendental subject.’ She talks about the nature of the basis of the subject in acting as constitutive of the internal features within the subject.⁷² The knowledge criteria that are inherent in these philosophical systems or worldviews are couched in highly ‘rationalistic’ terms to create a false sense of power/superiority for white subjectivity and denigrate the thought systems of those people (Others) who do not meet such set criteria. Similarly, Harold Morick describes epistemic authority ultimately as a distinguishing mark of the psychological. It is maintained that the authority of our honestly avowed reports of immediate contents of consciousness is contingent on the present scientific knowledge about the relationships between consciousness and the body, and in particular the brain.⁷³ This position by Morick is overly rationalistic imagery of epistemic authority which is referring to a specific reference drawn from a specific knowledge-context—the context of white consciousness of white subjectivity. This position has been criticized by Michael Baurmann⁷⁴ who opines that the

outcome of the individual rational strategies of knowledge acquisition is dependent on the “epistemic environment” in which the individuals live and seek orientation.

Another troubling issue with this notion of epistemic authority as constructed in Euro-American analytic epistemology is the fact that it creates a system of epistemological dependency. This system of dependency plays out when the European/white subject is constructed as a superior knower who possesses the authority for knowledge, Non-whites/Blacks becomes the constructed inferior by necessity. This is clearly articulated in Richard De George’s *The Nature and Limits of Authority* when he asserts that someone or something (X) is an authority if he (she, or it) stands in relation to someone else (Y) as superior stands to inferior concerning some realm, field, or domain (R).⁷⁵ In a similar vein, Linda Zagzebski articulates epistemic authority as a form of epistemic dependency when she describes this as a privileged epistemic standpoint. Using her epistemic lens as a foil, she avows thus; “I am committed to thinking of other persons as epistemically trustworthy if I think of myself as epistemically trustworthy, but my trust in myself is basic. On this account of epistemic authority, the ‘other’ person’s authority is something that is inferred from the self’s standpoint.”⁷⁶ So, on this account, “the Self” or the “abstracted Self” sees *itself* as the superior authority upon which all others will depend to assert epistemic categories in the world. This is a set-up of the power matrix of knowledge that is emblematic of the colonialization of knowledge because if the self chooses not to recognize the epistemic authority of the other (which is very common in human transactional relationships), then the transference of epistemic authority on Zagzebski’s account fails. Thus, in a Eurocentric context, Blacks would never be “others” that the white subject can have epistemic trust in or believe is epistemically trustworthy.

This system of coloniality set up by Euro-American epistemologists presupposes a condition of reliance—reliance on the thoughts of white philosophers and epistemologists to construct, understand, and interpret a people’s reality and existence. So, if the Black epistemological perspective is conceived through the lens of whiteness it becomes a second-rate discourse and can never depict the reality of Black existence. This is what Molefi Asante metaphorically refers to as *Rooming in the Master’s House*. This is a system of mental enslavement that further affirms the myth of the intellectual inferiority of Blacks. It makes one less human.⁷⁷ It creates the illusion that Black people are trying to attain the status of whiteness and we become imprisoned in such a system of mental colonization.

Much of the pathology of [Black] people today is this vain hope that somehow we will be able to escape our [Black] heritage, that somehow the white man will become color blind and will not see us for whom and what we are, that somehow we will be looked upon as some kind of abstraction—as just a man. Not as a [Black] man, but as a man, a human being *only*—without culture, without recognition, without identity.⁷⁸

But this is not how Blackness is viewed or characterized in contemporary society as well as within modern social circles on knowledge formation, acquisition, and utilization. This idea of knowledge or ontological realities as a collection of abstract entities helps to masquerade the systematic abjuration of Black subjects as worthy epistemic agents, as well as an extraverted sense of identity. It is this system of extraverted individuality that is occasioned by the system of colonization inherent in the Eurocentric discourse of knowledge that made Walter Mignolo defend the view that the critique of the European paradigm of rationality is indispensable—even more urgent. Mignolo believes that it is necessary to extricate oneself from the links between rationality/modernity and coloniality, first of all, and definitely from all power which is not constituted by free decisions made by free people. It is the instrumentalization of the reasons for power, of colonial power in the first place which produced distorted paradigms of knowledge.⁷⁹

Mack Jones has shown how this system of epistemic authority that sustains the coloniality of power and knowledge in the socio-political sphere. He writes that modernization theory used in explaining the politics of developing states reflect the Eurocentric bias of the American worldview and serves the interest of those seeking to maintain western dominance of developing states. They do so by suggesting that western societies represent the ideal state of development and that for poorer countries to reach a similar state they must adopt the values of the west.⁸⁰

The problem with this epistemological set-up is that Black, Brown, and all non-white subjects become trapped-souls in the domineering conceptual schemes of white/European subjectivity.⁸¹ In *Afrikan-Centered Consciousness Versus the New World Order*, Amos N. Wilson describes this as what creates the pathological individual. This is an individual who seems to be determined by external forces (or by internal forces) of which he has little or no knowledge. He is often constantly puzzled by his behavior. He is often a wonderment to himself. He struggles against impulses, desires, and wishes over which he has little or no control because he has, in his escape from self-knowing and reality, conceded his self-control and given it over to someone else. In releasing his identity and permitting another to place an identity within his psyche, he has at the same time placed in the hands of that other the ability to control his behavior.⁸² This pathological condition is generated in the ways by which epistemic authority is grounded in ‘rationality’ or ‘reflectivity’ of the ‘self’ and how this construction upholds certain assumptions about people based on their perceived class or race which plays an equally important role in constructing epistemic authority. The anomie of this reality is that people who appear to be white are seen to be carrying more epistemic authority on their shirt sleeves.⁸³ In what follows, I argue that the grounding of epistemic authority within the disembodied “Self” is an extension of the Euro-American project of enslavement, particularly, mental

colonization/enslavement which needs to be rejected because it does not account for Black epistemic authority within the scheme of knowledge. So, I explore a new epistemological vision of epistemic authority grounded in the thoughts of two important Black philosophers—W.E.B. DuBois and Fanon.

Blackness Unbound: Epistemologies of the Black ‘Self’ in Africana Philosophy

...all knowledges are situated and every knowledge is constructed. But that is just the beginning. The question is: who... is constructing knowledges?

— Walter D. Mignolo, 2009

One of the cardinal issues that is under consideration in this chapter, concerns how the legacies of biological racism purveyed as social epistemology was deployed to deny the “gift” of humanity to Blacks. This also contributed to undermining the value of bodies of literature and philosophical reflections produced by Black thinkers where they developed epistemologies of the self from a Black perspective as a way of humanizing Blackness within a society that thrives and profits on varying degrees of anti-Blackness. There is a long tradition of Black epistemic work within the Black intellectual tradition that highlights the genius and creativity of Black folks in terms of the generation of knowledge schemes, divining methodological episteme through which Black humanity could be affirmed. In negation of the false epistemic paradigms aimed at pathologizing Blackness. This epistemic work in the specifically North American context includes (but is not limited to) that of David Walker, Fredrick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, W.E.B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, the academics/intellectuals of the American Negro Academy, Carter Woodson, Anna Julia Cooper, and so on.⁸⁴ However, the works of Du Bois and Fanon will constitute the focal point of this section. Especially how these two Black intellectuals, Du Bois and Fanon, albeit in a different epoch, developed principles of Black epistemological thought to provide a systematic understanding of the Black condition and to imagine a positive

vision for Black humanity. They both grounded their philosophical reflections and socio-epistemic perspective on the Black experience.

What does it mean to think of Black humanity through the lens of epistemology in a context where race and epistemological categories are utilized to undermine the agency, subjectivity, and humanity of Blacks? In chapter four of her well-known text, *Scenes of Subjection*, entitled “The Burdened Individuality of Freedom,” Saidiya Hartman seems to foreshadow this question when she inquires that “if race formerly determined who was ‘man’ and who was chattel, whose property rights were protected or recognized and who was property, with [B]lackness as the mark of object status and whiteness licensing the propriety of self, then how did emancipation affect the status of race?”⁸⁵ This question highlights the deep roots of the erasure of Blackness from the realm of “man” or humanity propelled by a virulent version of biological racism, and the markers of race-based human differentiation, championed by early white anthropologists and ethnologists which provided fodder for the heinous violence meted against Blacks during slavery. It is a debased form of bifurcated logic between the Self and the objected-Other that Black thinkers had to contend with for them to effectively formulate distinctive epistemologies of the self that could account for the undermined Black humanity—unbounding Blackness. W.E.B. Du Bois in “The Conservation of Races,” (originally published in 1897) would attack this debased form of human differentiation based on racial and biological categories as a product of faulty and racially prejudiced science. Du Bois argues that “when we thus come to inquire into the essential difference of races we find it hard to come at once to any definite conclusion [because] many criteria of race differences have in the past been proposed, as color, hair, cranial measurements and language.”⁸⁶

In “The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race,” Anthony Appiah argues that the larger claim that DuBois is making in “The Conservation of Races” is that “race” is not a scientific—that is, biological—concept. It is a sociohistorical concept.⁸⁷ According to Appiah, Du Bois’s challenge to the hegemonic understanding of race in the nineteenth century introduces a dialectic—the thesis of this dialectic, is described by Du Bois as the American Negro’s [Black] attempt to “minimize race distinctions”— and the denial of difference.⁸⁸ For Appiah, Du Bois’ antithesis is the acceptance of difference, along with a claim that each group has its part to play; that the white race and its racial Others are related not as superior to inferior but as complementaries; that the Negro message is, with the white one, part of the message of humankind.⁸⁹ Appiah then goes on to argue that Du Bois’ attempt to interrogate the concept of race is not directed towards “the transcendence of the nineteenth-century scientific conception of race.”⁹⁰ This argument by Appiah shows a pedestrian reading of DuBois’ preoccupation in penning “The Conservation of Races.” Especially when one notes that in the same essay, DuBois contends that “the question, then, which we must seriously consider is this: what is the real meaning of race; what has, in the past been history of race development to teach the rising Negro people?”⁹¹ Since the nineteenth-century conception of race characterizes the Black race, as an inferior race, Du Bois was very clear about the need to transcend this negative conception of race and evolve a new race-concept that is grounded in “Pan-Negroism,” an embodiment of Black genius, with “wonderful possibilities.” In Du Bois’ own words;

For this reason, the advance guard of the Negro people—the eight million people of Negro blood in the United States of America—must soon come to realize that if they are to take their just place in the van of Pan-Negroism, then their destiny is not absorption by the white Americans. That if in America it is to be proven for the first time in the modern world that not only are Negroes capable of evolving individual men like Toussaint the Savior, but are a nation stored with wonderful possibilities of culture, then their destiny is not a servile imitation of Anglo-Saxon culture, but stalwart originality which shall unswervingly follow negro ideals.⁹²

Thus, at the very least, Appiah's description of the central thesis of Du Bois' in "The Conservation of Races" is a mischaracterization. Du Bois fundamentally conceived the ethnological assumptions and race-concept of the nineteenth century as flawed—he articulated this in many of his essays such as, "The Propaganda of History," "On Being Ashamed of Oneself," "The Concept of Race," to mention just a few. Du Bois believes that the faulty and hegemonic scientific imaginations, contained in those systems of thought, cannot be used to study the social or existential condition of Black folks in the real world. Du Bois was very clear about this in his discussion of the problems of Black folks. According to him, "most persons have accepted that tacit but clear modern philosophy which assigns to the white race alone the hegemony of the world and assumes that other races, and particularly the [Black] race, will either be content to serve the interests of the whites or die out before their all-conquering march. This philosophy is the child of the African slave trade and the expansion of Europe during the nineteenth century."⁹³ Including the philosophical and moral ethos that constitutes the backbone of this period. Since this adapted epistemological system of modern philosophy is morally bankrupt and intellectually deficient, Du Bois constructed a new vision that "regards American [Blacks] as typical and human and the results of a study of his conditions as capable of being scientific."⁹⁴ What Du Bois sets up here, is an epistemological paradigm that projects the Black human as a 'Self' that is capable of logically structuring the phenomenal and nominal experience.

In a very succinct manner, Du Bois would later express this as one of the fundamental principles undergirding the worldview of *Phylon*, the peer-reviewed journal that he founded at Atlanta University in 1940— in his essay entitled "Phylon: Science or Propaganda," Du Bois maintains that "there are certain things PHYLON assumes without any attempt at proof; among

these are the equal humanity of persons of Negro descent; and the capability of [Blacks] to progress and develop along essentially the same lines as other folk.”⁹⁵ This assertion by Du Bois is the affirmation of the a priori basis of thinking while Black or Blacked[ness]. It orients us toward a world where Blackness is not being thought of in relation to extraverted conditions of the human that is tangentially applied to the Black lived experience. Under this orientation, Blackness occupies the epicenter of thought and how the world is lived. It is an epistemological posture that centers Blackness at its core, oblivious of the negative attenuations through which Blackness is reduced in the present order of knowledge.

In his work on “W.E.B. Du Bois and the Study of Black Humanity,” Anthony Monteiro argues that Du Bois is both a transformative and transgressive Black epistemologist who used his philosophical genius to unbound Blackness from the shackles of liminality and cause epistemic ruptures in the hegemonic order of western knowledge or epistemological categories. Such epistemic rupturing, in the end, changed not only the way we think about the world and ourselves but also the way we exist in the world. Du Bois, from theoretical and epistemological standpoints, was a breakthrough or revolutionary thinker. His breakthroughs occur from the margins of white academic and intellectual practices and from within the veil. Yet, he emerges organically from the lived experience of Blacks while asserting, in the most transgressive civilizational sense the centrality of Blackness to humanity’s knowledge of itself.⁹⁶

Thus, in the discourse of knowledge, there is no need to imbibe epistemic categories in affirming the Black “Self” as a self-legislating Being with epistemic authority to make knowledge claims. By advocating a new system of Black self-epistemology, Du Bois was presenting a living alternative to the western idea of positivism and scientific objectivism. In this new system of thinking, Black knowledge production in this Du Boisean construal is an active

process whereby the researcher, scientist, or practitioner actively engages the object of knowledge. Hence, an unbreakable dialectical relationship emerges between the Black subject and the object of knowledge. In this line of thinking, knowledge for its own sake, as a reified object of science is rejected. Du Bois, it seems, does not fall prey to this error in that his concept of the active subject actively engaged with objects that themselves are active and ever-changing is what is important. Knowledge is, henceforth, a living product of the intellectual engagement of the active Black subject with the living objects of knowledge.⁹⁷

We see this aspect of epistemologies of the Black ‘Self’ which emphasizes Black knowledge as living knowledge in many of the writings of Du Bois. For instance, in “My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom” Du Bois writes thus “up to this time, I had been absorbing a general view of human knowledge: in ancient and modern literatures; in mathematics, physics and chemistry and history. It was all in vague and general terms—interpretations of what men who knew the facts at first hand, thought they might mean; I was in possession of the average educated man’s concept of this world and its meaning. But now I wanted to go further: to know what man could know and how to collect and interpret facts face to face. And what facts were.”⁹⁸ This existential approach was very pivotal to his many groundbreaking studies that resulted into monumental works like *The Study of the Negro Problems* (1898) *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), *The Negro in Business* (1899), *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), including the numerous publications from his Atlanta Sociological Studies (1897-1910) and so many more.

W.E. B. Du Bois did not leave anyone in doubt about the fact that his work was primarily centered on Black people. As he clearly states; “the scope of my program of life [is] to center it in a group of educated Negroes [Blacks], who from their knowledge and experience would lead

the mass.”⁹⁹ What this suggests is that DuBois did not rely on western systems of knowledge or epistemic authority to create knowledge—which led to the creation of the field of sociology.¹⁰⁰ As Du Bois articulated himself; “thus in my quest for basic knowledge with which to help guide the American Negro [Black], I came to the study of sociology.”¹⁰¹ One of the most definitive studies regarding the birth of American sociology, is Aldon Morris, *The Scholar Denied: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Birth of Sociology*. In this work, Morris argued that although Du Bois and his collaborators, did indeed build a sociological school (The Atlanta Sociological Laboratory) that challenged scientific racism by generating findings suggesting races were socially constructed and that social conditions largely determined racial inequality, his research was suppressed by white sociologists.¹⁰² There were obvious reasons why white sociologists suppressed Du Bois’ scholarship. To embrace Du Bois’ sociology, they would need to acknowledge that their theories proclaiming the biological and cultural inferiority of blacks could not be supported scientifically.¹⁰³ Additionally, there were deeply personal and cultural reasons why white social scientists suppressed DuBois’s scholarship. Early in the twentieth century, whites viewed all African Americans as inferior, even Black intellectuals such as Du Bois. White social scientists could not embrace Black excellence in science, let alone the superiority of a Black scientist.¹⁰⁴ Based on his findings, Morris argued that “the Du Bois-Atlanta school deserves credit for founding scientific sociology in America.”¹⁰⁵

Making the study of the condition of Black folk, his life-long project, Du Bois went on to compile two centuries of history of the Negro in Philadelphia and the Seventh Ward and breadth of work that touches on almost every aspect of the black life. This dedication to the Black condition deeply influenced the Atlanta conferences and the numerous works that were produced about Black folks within this period. In *Black Folk, Then and Now: An Essay in the History and*

Sociology of the Negro Race W.E.B. Du Bois expounds on the view that it was the persistent quest of Blacks for knowledge and self-understanding that gave birth to the public-school system in America. DuBois contends that amid all these difficulties (Jim Crow discrimination and oppression), the Black governments in the South accomplished much of positive good. From which three things Black rule gave to the South are easily recognizable: (1) democratic government (2) free public schools, (3) new social legislation. There is no doubt that the thirst of the Black man for knowledge, a thirst which has been too persistent and durable to be mere curiosity or whim, gave birth to the public-school system of the South. It was the question upon which Black voters and legislators insisted more than anything else, and while it is possible to find some vestiges of free schools in some Southern States before the war, yet a universal, well-established system dates from the day that the Black man got political power.¹⁰⁶

The philosophical reflections of Du Bois on the study of the material and existential conditions of Black people make nonsense of the Eurocentric epistemologists claim that the authority to investigate knowledge had to be “gifted” by white folks. Du Bois embarked on the project of creating Black knowledge as an important aspect of humanizing Blackness. For instance, in his essay on “The Training of Negroes for Social Power,” Du Bois develops a Black socio-epistemic perspective that is focused on the need for Blacks to eschew ignorance while providing insights on how Black people can achieve human progress with socio-scientific knowledge of their material conditions within a repressive system and to give the world a mass of truth worth the knowing. Du Bois argues that the responsibility for their social regeneration ought to be placed largely upon the shoulders of the Black people. But such responsibility without power is a mockery and a farce. If therefore the American people are sincerely anxious that Blacks shall put forth their best efforts to help themselves, they must see to it that they are

not deprived of the freedom and power to strive. The responsibility for dispelling their ignorance implies that the power to overcome ignorance is to be placed in Black people's hands; the lessening of poverty calls for the power of effective work.¹⁰⁷

Du Bois' socio-epistemic perspective largely focused on studying the Black problem; it encompasses the phenomena of social metamorphosis and Black people's place within society, and how to move this towards the project of racial uplift. He went beyond the stereotypical imagery of Blackness as an endemic manifestation of the pathologies of the human condition, to avow the importance of creating knowledge about and for Black people through socio-scientific inquiry and this demonstrates the epistemic authority associated with Blackness. This is why Du Bois argues in *Black Folk, Then and Now* that Blacks have long been the clown of history; the football of anthropology; and the slave of industry. He wrote this text to show why these attitudes can no longer be maintained.¹⁰⁸ This discourse on the epistemologies of the Black 'Self' opens up space to talk about the creation of Black knowledges without recourse to alien accretions; as Du Bois argues, "to know all about Blacks, it is certain that we can know vastly more than we do, and that we can have our knowledge in more systematic and intelligible form."¹⁰⁹

Du Bois fundamentally believes that the material conditions and the long years of discrimination that Black people have endured in the new world provide them with a unique insight into the world different from any Eurocentric epistemic analysis of the world. This is why his sociological studies focused primarily on the *Souls* and conditions of Black folks. For Du Bois, sociological investigations of existential phenomena should aim to study those finer manifestations of social life which history cannot but mention and which statistics cannot count, such as expression of Black life as found in their hundred newspapers, their considerable

literature, their music and folklore and their germ of esthetic life—in fine, in all the movements and customs among them that manifest the existence of a distinct social mind.¹¹⁰ This idea of a distinct social mind would become important in Du Bois’ discussion of social power for Blacks. Here, social power means, assuredly, the growth of initiative among Blacks, the spread of independent thought, the expanding consciousness of mankind, which is conceived as the inevitable corollary of the fixing of social responsibility.¹¹¹

This notion of “social power” for Blacks developed by Du Bois is a cardinal feature of his thought on the epistemology of the Black self. He utilized this notion to emphasize the link between personal and political epistemologies through education and social organization because he believed that experience and knowledge constitute the genuine wealth that can truly make Black people rich. As Du Bois argues:

There must surely be among Negro [Black] leaders the philanthropic impulse, the uprightness of character and strength of purpose; but there must be more than these; philanthropy and purpose among [B] lack as well as among whites must be guided and curbed by knowledge and mental discipline—knowledge of forces of civilization that make for survival, ability to organize and guide those forces, and realization of the true meaning of those broader ideals of human betterment which may in time bring heaven and earth a little nearer. This is social power—it is gotten in many ways by experience, by social contact, by what we loosely call the chances of life. But the systematic method of acquiring and imparting it is by training of youth to thought, power, and knowledge in the school and college.¹¹²

Du Bois here is fashioning a philosophy of education that takes the project of Black acquisition of knowledge for personal and social transformation seriously. This vision is one that seeks to humanize Blackness. In this regard, Du Bois believes that a rationally arranged college course of study for men and women able to pursue it is the best and only method of putting into the world Blacks with the ability to use the social forces of their race to stamp out crime, strengthen the home, eliminate degenerates, and inspire and encourage the higher tendencies of the race not only in thought and aspiration but in everyday toil.¹¹³

This Du Boisean project of humanizing Blackness through an emphasis on the production of Black knowledges and epistemes has been highlighted in contemporary scholarship as well. In “Humanizing Blackness,” Tommy J. Curry argues that “we must support the creativity and innovation of Black scholarship. What we’re trying to do is create new conditions for new possibilities of how people can think by eliminating the barriers and obstacles to [B]lack humanity and Black aspirations as much as possible.”¹¹⁴ The foundation for this type of argument that Curry makes was laid by scholars like Du Bois who extended his socio-epistemic perspective to the project of humanizing Blackness by showing that even within the dire conditions of enslavement in the new world, Black people have been creating knowledge through unique systems of thought and epistemic authority of expertise. In his work entitled: “Possibilities of the Negro: The Advance Guard of the Race” Du Bois argues that even though the average American does not regard Black people as human, they tend to deny their genius and creativity. He writes that “the average American, accustomed to regarding Black [people] as the outer edge of humanity, not only easily misses seeing the colored men who have accomplished something in the world common to both races but also misses entirely the work of the men who are developing the dark isolated world of the Black man.”¹¹⁵

Du Bois conceives of Black humanity as emblematic of Black genius. As he claims: “so here I am seeking to bring to mind something of what men of African blood are today doing in America, by selecting as types ten living Negroes [Blacks] who, in ability and quite regardless of their black blood have raised themselves to a place distinctively above the average mankind; I do say that measured by any fair standard of human accomplishment they are distinctively men of mark and that they have enough Black blood in their veins.”¹¹⁶ What DuBois is doing with this project of humanizing Blackness is that he is celebrating the achievements of Black people in

various areas of human endeavor including commerce, literature industry, political life and learned professions to show that there are actual black inventors and pioneers in these areas who created great ideas and businesses without any recourse to white/Eurocentric frames. Du Bois' referencing of Black genius here ruptures the pretentious hegemony of colonial narratives that consider knowledge production in all fields of human endeavor as a prerogative or privilege of white subjectivity. Du Bois recognizes Black epistemic authority that Black subjects possess, as a function of why they had so many achievements and distinctions, both material and spiritual, to contribute to human civilization.¹¹⁷ For instance, DuBois argues that “the gift of the spirit,” is one of the areas where Blacks have contributed to American life and human civilization, even though this is hard to define or characterize. It is the beautiful spirit of a people (Black people), imbued with “a slow conception of the universe, a drawling and slurring off speech, an intense sensitiveness to spiritual values—all these things and others like to them, tell of the imprint of Africa on Europe in America.”¹¹⁸

In the mid-twentieth century, Frantz Fanon would draw from the legacies of Du Bois to develop one of the most penetrating and powerful critiques of western/colonial logics and hegemonic epistemologies. Fanon would diagnose western/colonial epistemes and accretions as the prime causative of mental disorder and the psychological feeling of inferiority among colonized Black folks including all forms of ‘Self-’estrangement, in the same manner that Du Bois divined the color-line to be the problem of the twenty-first century which generates the phenomenon of double consciousness as well as ‘Self-’estrangement. As Fanon asserts in *Black Skin, White Masks*, “inferiorization is the native correlative to the European’s feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say: *It is the racist who creates the inferiorized.*”¹¹⁹ Fanon’s critique has something to do with the convergence of the problematic of colonialism

with that of subject-formation, especially the absence of agential recognition for Blacks within colonial systems of thought. As a psychoanalyst of culture, as a champion of the wretched of the earth, he is an almost irresistible figure for a criticism that sees itself as both oppositional and postmodern.¹²⁰

Thus, what Fanon describes, as colonial recognition will often provoke within the oppressed a desire to “escape” their particularity, to negate the differences that mark them as morally deficient and inferior in the eyes of the colonizer, as codified in such expressions as “The [Black] is an animal, the [Black] is bad, the [Black] is wicked, the [Black] is ugly” in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Once internalized, these derogatory images often produce a pathological yearning to “be recognized *not as Black, but as White*.” Fanon uses several terms to describe the result of this process: “inferiority complex,” “psycho-existential complex,” “neurosis,” and “alienation” being the most common. All of these designations are used by Fanon to describe the subjectifying hold that colonial power can have on those within its reach. Seen in this light, there is nothing “inherent” about the perceived “inferiority” attributed to colonized subjects by the dominant society, nor is there anything “natural” about the so-called “complexes” they suffer as a result. Both are the product of colonial social relations: “If there is a flaw, it lies not in the ‘soul’ of the [colonized] individual, but his environment.”¹²¹ Which necessitates the dismantling of this colonial system of thought and its knowledge categories.

I consider as apposite, Sylvia Wynter’s assessment in “Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the puzzle of Conscious Experience, and What It is Like to Be “Black,” that Fanon’s dually third-person and first-person exploration of the lived experience of being Black in his book *Black Skin, White masks* was both to develop the earlier insights of Black American thinkers such as W.B. DuBois concerning the conflicted “double consciousness” in [Blacks] in

western civilization and to put forward, as the explanatory cause of his “double consciousness” a new theoretical object of knowledge—sociogeny.¹²² So, what Wynter is suggesting here is that since Fanon was able to diagnose that the present/dominant order of knowledge undermines or erases Black humanity, it was important for him to develop a new concept of [Black] knowledge or the science of knowledge—sociogeny—that upholds a new conception of the human, and Black humanity.

Such a new science would, therefore, have to be (as already suggested by Fanon’s exploration of the lived experience of the black) one able to harness the findings of the natural sciences (including the neurosciences) to its purposes, yet able to transcend them in terms of a new synthesis able to make our uniquely hybrid nature/culture modes of being human, of human identity, subject to scientific description in a new way.¹²³

What Wynter identifies in Fanon, in the quote above is the dire need to transcend hegemonic ascriptions of knowledge and move towards a new conception of the ‘Black’ human. To create a new Black epistemology that accounts for Blackness or the Black lived experience, Fanon makes it clear that such a project will have to struggle with reason as unreason.

To put it more succinctly, Fanon acknowledges that because the normative principles, including the moral ethos of viewing the world through a colonial-hegemonic lens, is adjudged and consecrated as that which is derived out of “reason” or reasonable ground of judgment, any attempt to stray away from or challenge such colonial logics or rationality will always be seen as “irrational.” This is what Fanon highlights when he maintains in *Toward the African Revolution* that “the unilaterally decreed normative value of certain cultures deserves our careful attention. One of the paradoxes immediately encountered is the rebound of egocentric, sociocentric definitions.”¹²⁴ That is insights into the laws which govern the realm of lived subjective experience, human and non-human, which govern, therefore, the interrelated phenomena of identity, mind, and/or consciousness¹²⁵ are founded on precepts that are codified as the

normative way of viewing the world. Fanon understood that colonial exploitation was not just about the imperial practices of pillaging the land and human persons as sources of odious material gain, but also as a form of psychological warfare which aims to forcefully make Blacks believe themselves as inferior under the western or colonial ethos and calculated attempt to create a fictive Being out of the colonized.

This is why Fanon argues that “the colonial subject is a man [human] penned in; apartheid is but one method of compartmentalizing the colonial world. The first thing the colonial subject learns is to remain in his place and not overstep its limits.”¹²⁶ Here, Fanon is signifying one of the ultimate objectives of the colonial project—which is to demarcate a horizon of control, that includes the control of markers of Being such as agency, subjective articulation of experience and the freedom to challenge imposed systems of thought and norms. The “human penned-in” is a metaphor for the colonized subject that has been captured under this system of control and is now exhibiting characteristics of pathology as the “norm,” while staying within the boundaries of the human—as the non-human. This dichotomy is maintained because, as Fanon says, the colonial world, including colonial logic of rationality is already imposed through the bifurcated logic of segregation, in all its political, economic, social, material, and metaphysical manifestations. It is interesting to note that Fanon’s diagnosis of this pathological condition of the colonized/Black subject penned-in, was necessary for him to imagine its contrary—“the human penned-out.”

The idea of the “human penned-out” is a powerful idea from Fanonian meditations that focuses on the creative epistemic power of the authorial Being/Black subject towards “penning” an alternative sociogenic reality where Blackness demonstrates a form of agential control that is not merely geo-spatial but also controlling mental or psychological states. As Fanon himself puts

it, “deep down the colonized subject acknowledges no authority. He is dominated but not domesticated. He is made to feel inferior, but by no means convinced of his inferiority.” With this, Fanon challenges the colonial epistemological categories that erase Blackness from the space of ‘reason’ and initiates or unleashes a new vision for Blackness in the ‘space of reasons.’ This is a state of awareness where the Black subject exhibits its epistemic authority by “acknowledging no [other] authority” for cataloging the lived experience. Fanon imagines a different kind of agential control which consists of affirming the epistemic power of the Black subject in refusing to be caricaturized and relegated to the realm of liminality.

Whereas, the colonial logical or epistemological system of understanding the world is the one that operates on an “irrational” logic because it obeys a system of thought that normalizes race-prejudice. For Fanon, such a system of “race prejudice obeys a flawless logic. A country that lives, draws its substance from the exploitation of other peoples, makes those peoples inferior. Race prejudice applied to those people is normal.”¹²⁷ Fanon opposes the normalization of raced and prejudiced logic that thrives and derives its validity from the inferiorization of Blackness. This necessitates a struggle for reason—reasonable grounds for putting Blackness back into the human world—is a subversion of “reason” in colonial logic. Thus, Fanon’s rationalization of the irrational world is in itself a new conception of anti-colonial epistemology. This anti-colonial epistemology is primarily focused on rupturing the order of knowledge and colonial impulses that perpetually seeks to categorizes Blackness as a conceptual impossibility—a nothing or non-existent entity. Fanon, therefore, begins his anti-colonial epistemology with an affirmation of Blackness in the present tense and reclaiming Blackness from the so-called normative imaginary that castigates the *itself*, a mythic configuration of that which is not.

This is what Fanon does when he asserts that “my [B]lackness was there, dense and undeniable. And it tormented me, pursued me, made me uneasy, and exasperated me. [Blacks] are savages, morons, and illiterates. But I knew personally that in my case these assertions were wrong. There was this myth of [Blacks] that had to be destroyed at all costs.¹²⁸ Fanon’s torment is a description of the internal conflicts and struggles that the Black subject experiences as it is coated with negated categories of Being. Fanon is also describing how the psychological residue of the affliction of the colonial hegemonic and mythic constructions or negations seeks to undermine Blackness—even when it is undeniably present as Fanon asserts. The only way for the Black subject to be free from this mythic categorization is to dismantle it or “destroy it at all costs.” In *Whither Fanon? Studies in Blackness of Being*, David Marriott, interprets Fanon’s suggestion of rupturing the colonial system of thought was necessary for the redemption of Black humanity.¹²⁹ This passage from *Black Skin, White Masks* quoted above also suggests that Fanon’s existence raises the question of the relationship between humanity and reason, and problems raised by what he calls “the fact of blackness.” If even reason or the understanding is infected with racism where unreason stands on the opposite pole as a Manichaeian abyss of Blackness, then a Black person who reasons finds himself in the absurdity of the very construction of himself as Black person/human *who reasons*. Such a Black person, such as Fanon, is deemed to be irrational. Thus, for Fanon, the “irrational” becomes “the new rational” under a new regime of epistemology—Black epistemology whose orientation of knowledge is constantly opposing and moving away from the western logic of rationality because it undermines Black subjectivity/humanity. As Fanon powerfully declares in *Black Skin, White Masks* “I had rationalized the world, and the world had rejected me in the name of color prejudice. Since there was no way we could agree based on reason, I resorted to irrationality.”¹³⁰

Like DuBois, what Fanon is doing here is subverting the hegemony of western logic and initiating a new kind of logic for viewing the Black lived experience in the world—an anti-colonial logic of the self—changing the dynamics for ordering and othering the world. This is what Fanon means when he asserts further that “for the sake of the cause, I had adopted the process of regression, but the fact remained that it was an unfamiliar weapon; here I am at home; I am made of the irrational; I wade in the irrational. Irrational up to my neck.”¹³¹ The “irrational” for Fanon is the weapon of liberation and the weapon of power. The power to construct a new world where Blackness is not inferiorized but humanized. Fanon is also laying the foundation for characterizing Black epistemic authority to construct a new vision of the world that is devoid on anti-Black racist impulses; this is a vision of existence that displaces and discountenances the hegemonic logics in western epistemological framing of the world including all bifurcated regime of meaning that catalogs Blackness in alternate categories of Being. For Fanon, “the irrational” is not irrational, it is the new form of “rational”—primarily, a Black expression of rationality. This is how the Black subject can make sense of the world replete with the colorized prejudice that informs the colonial codification of reason. Thus, a Black expression of rationality under a different schema, such as the sociogenic understanding of knowledge, *a la* Fanon, is at the same time an expression of the ontogeny of Black humanity.

In sum, the exposition in this chapter aims to show that the critical and philosophical reflections of DuBois and Fanon orients us towards a vision of a ‘space of reasons’ where Blackness is not erased but affirmed. It is an intellectual space where the Black subject or ‘Self’ in *itself* is conceived as an epistemic agent that constructs knowledges from the vantage point of the Black experience. Thus, the uptake from this discourse on epistemic authority, in relation to Blackness, is that black subjectivity becomes a symbol of power—the power to avow knowledge

concerning Black existence and the validation of Black intellect, brilliance, and genius—it is a project of humanizing Blackness. The project of humanizing Blackness is not only important to the preservation of Black intellectual heritage but also to affirm the necessity of Black existence in a world where pathologization of Blackness is regarded as an acceptable social reality. This is why the theorizing of Black Epistemologies of the Self is important in Africana Philosophy

References

1. Calvin Warren, *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 27.

2. *Ibid.*, 37.

3. This hegemonic posture of western philosophical praxis that seeks to universalize subjective knowledge claims have been described by Michael A. Peters and Carl Mika as “the blindness of western philosophy.” This blindness consists in the uncritical knowledge attribution that convey the idea that philosophical thinking, within the western tradition, is a neutral entity, which is actually not the case. In “Through the Crucible of Pain and Suffering,” George Yancy describes this blindness as evidence of the narcissism of western philosophy which is heralded by the specter of racism as well as the unacknowledged limits of white forms of knowing. In this regard, Yancy argues that the characterization of whiteness as the transcendental norm is productive of a form of ignorance endemic to western philosophical practices that are myopic and hegemonic. This is why he believes that an alternate philosophical paradigm such as African-American philosophy should be seen as a gift, as a critical counter-narrative that can be deployed to fissure western philosophy’s narcissism. In a similar vein, Francis A. Akena argues in “Critical Analysis of the Production of Western Knowledge,” that western philosophy’s attempt to universalize its epistemic principles, and its perspective on issues and relation of ideas, is a vehicle for achieving the colonization of knowledge within non-Eurocentric societies. Especially noting that European colonizers have defined legitimate knowledge as western knowledge, fundamentally European colonizers’ ways of knowing, often taken as objective and universal knowledge. Arriving with the colonizers and influenced by western ethnocentrism, western knowledge imposed a monolithic world view that gave power and control in the hands of Europeans. It delegitimized other ways of knowing as savage, superstitious, and primitive. [Akena -p.600] Meanwhile, in *The Invention of Women* Oyèrónké Oyewùmí, exposes the limitation of knowledge schemes developed within the western cultural praxis as limited in its assumption of universalism formed from a particularist epistemological prism— the significance of this observation is that one cannot assume the social and epistemological organization of one culture (the dominant west included) as universal or the interpretations of the experiences of one

culture as explaining another one. See Cecil Foster, *Blackness and Modernity: The Colour of Humanity and the Quest for Freedom* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 123; see also Michael A. Peters and Carl Mika, ed., *The Dilemma of Western Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 2; George Yancy, "Through the Crucible of Pain and Suffering: African-American philosophy as a gift and the countering of the western philosophical metanarrative," in *The Dilemma of Western Philosophy*, ed. Michael A. Peters and Carl Mika (New York: Routledge, 2018), 19; Oyèrónké Oyewùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 10.

4. Tendayo Sithole, "The Concept of the Black Subject in Fanon," *Journal of Black Studies* 47, no. 1 (2016): 35

5. Cecil Foster, 125.

6. Emmanuel Eze, *On Reason: Rationality in a World of Cultural Conflict and Racism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 171.

7. Calvin Warren, "Black Nihilism and the Politics of Hope," *The New Centennial Review* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2015):

8. George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race in America* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), xxx.

9. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa*, Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.

10. *Ibid.*, xxxi.

11. Robert Dunn, "Psychological Differences of the Races of Men," *Transactions of Ethnological Society of London* III, new series (1865): 21.

12. Melissa Stein, *Measuring Manhood: Race and the Science of Masculinity, 1830-1934* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 45.

13. *Ibid.*, 48.

14. The classification of human groups (Caucasians and the colored races) into varieties or races of men was attempted by eighteenth and early nineteenth century naturalists, but they were unable to formulate a common index to distinguish one race of men from another. To visually identify differences was one thing, but to determine a method for measurement and an index for tracing affinities among the various races was a far more vexatious undertaking. For the nineteenth century anthropologist, anthropometry or anatomical measurement, became a focal point. [hence the birth of craniology and craniometrics during this period]. See. John S. Haller, Jr., *Outcasts from Evolution: Scientific Attitudes of Racial Inferiority, 1859-1900* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 3 & 96.

15. Buckner H. P. Ariel, *The Negro: What is His Ethnological Status?* (Cincinnati: Published for the Proprietor, 1867), 4.

16. Although Ariel sets out to disprove the prevalent myths among the white racial intelligentsia concerning the descendance of Black folks from Ham. As he argues in *The Negro: What is His Ethnological Status*, [p.45] "We have shown (1.) that Ham was not made a negro, neither by his name, nor the curse (or the supposed curse) of his father Noah. (2.) We have shown that the people of India, China, Turkey, Egypt (Copts), now have long, straight hair, high foreheads, high noses and every lineament of the white race; [biological markers of a superior race] and that these are the descendants of Ham. (3.) That, therefore, it is impossible that Ham could be the father of the present race of Negroes." This overemphasis on

biological/physiological markers of the human will be used to construct the image of the savage in sociological studies of indigenous or ethnic populations during this period. A case in point is James Greenwood, *Curiosities of Savage Life*, which argues that as a rule, the skull of the Negro [Blacks] is remarkably long; it rarely approaches the broad type, and never exhibits the roundness of other races—the distinguishing features of a savage race which makes it incapable of achieving any form of civilization. Greenwood goes further to argue that “in no stage of his existence does the savage appear so as entirely to please us, his civilized brethren. I don’t know that this was ever observed to have a depressing effect on the savage mind, nor, in my humble opinion, should it do so. Whatever our notions may be to the contrary, the savage never yet had reason to regard civilization as a particularly lovely thing. See. Buckner H. P. Ariel, *The Negro: What is His Ethnological Status?* (Cincinnati: Published for the Proprietor, 1867), 6. and James Greenwood, *Curiosities of Savage Life*, 3rd Ed. (London: S.O. Beeton, 1865), 234.

17. Buckner H. P. Ariel, 25.

18. David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 6.

19. Samuel George Morton, *Types of Mankind or Ethnological Researches, Based Upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races, and Upon their Natural, Geographical, Philological, and Biblical History*, 7th Ed. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1855), xxx.

20. *Ibid.*, xxxiii.

21. Bruce Dain, *Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 197.

22. *Ibid.*, 197-198.

23. Samuel George Morton, *Crania Americana: or a Comparative View of the Skulls of Various Aboriginal Nations of North and South America* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1839), 31.

24. Even at a time when this racist notion of Black inferiority was being peddled in dominant epistemic frames within the framework of 18th century America, the intellectual prowess of Phillis Wheatley, the notable and highly impressive African American writer, poet, and orator was widely known. Though her genius was dismissed just as the missionaries who argued that Blacks were not different from whites intellectually were dismissed to maintain the master narrative of a dominant race with superior intellectual powers. With regards to the biological racist views peddled by Morton, there were some challenges from less notable men which were rebuffed by the generally adjudged veracity of Morton’s claims, thought to be deduced from scientific methods of cranial measurements. For instance, actual trans-Atlantic sojourners and missionaries countered the assumptions of Morton in regards to the group-inferiority of Black people. We know this through the counter-responses to these critical letters he received concerning his research. In one instance, Morton writes of a certain Mr. Lyell, who argued, in common with tourists less eminent, that Blacks in America, will in time, make cranial developments to the point where they would develop “intellect equal to the whites.” But Morton rebuts this argument by arguing that “this unscientific assertion is disproved by the cranial measurements,” he has spent his entire life accumulating and examining. He argues further that Blacks cannot in any account be thought of as being intelligent, but they may be able to improve their natural conditions through the associations with whites through slavery. In his view, that

Negroes [Blacks] imported and stolen into, or born in, the United States become more intelligent and better developed in their physique generally than their native compatriots of Africa, everyone will admit; but such intelligence is easily explained by their ceaseless contact with the whites, from whom they derive much instruction; and such physical improvement may also be readily accounted for by the increased comforts with which they are supplied. What this implies is that any traits of intelligence exhibited by Black slaves could not have been generated in and of itself; it is bequeathed to them by their encounters with their white enslavers. Basically, Morton is defending the view that the normative of standards of socially accruable goods, learning and education, and how the judgments of the standards for Black humanity ought to be seen as a derivative of whiteness. See. Samuel George Morton, *Crania Americana: or a Comparative View of the Skulls of Various Aboriginal Nations of North and South America* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1839), 260.

25. *Ibid.*, 15.

26. Stewart Chamberlain, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: John Lane, 1912), 252.

27. Thanks to this book, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, and because he was someone who mattered in Bayreuth, Chamberlain later became a very important mediator in the formulation of the Nazi ideology, before he died in 1927. He was, for the Germans, the “thinker” who popularized Gobineau’s ideas on the social Darwinists, providing the German bourgeoisie with a sense of its mission: “am deutschen wesen soll die welt genesen”—the German essence must heal the world. He became somewhat of a war hero during the First World War, during which he was a talented propagandist against his own country, Great Britain. An early “Lord Haw-Haw” of sorts who was even awarded the iron cross by Kaiser William II, not for fighting in the muddy trenches of the Somme, but for insulting London in vindictive articles. In the 1920’s, he met Hitler. He then joined the Nazi party before he passed away in 1927. Since the purpose of his *Foundations of the 19th Century* was to try and explain everything about life and history, it naturally had to start with Antiquity for the author’s exhaustive survey to have any semblance of logic at all. His most fundamental idea was that the Germanic race was the cornerstone and the pillar of civilization. This beautiful race (in every regard) was dominant in Germany and Austria, but also within the elites of the British Empire and of the United States of America. See. Johann Chapoutot, “From Humanism to Nazism: Antiquity in the Work of Houston Stewart Chamberlain,” *Miranda* [Online] 11, (July 2015): 3.

28. Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), 354.

29. *Ibid.*, 143.

30. John S. Haller, Jr., *Outcasts from Evolution*, 26.

31. David Hume, *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (London, 1758); quoted in Aaron Garrett, “Hume’s Revised Racism Revisited,” *Hume Studies* XXVI, no. 1 (April 2000): 171-172.

32. John S. Haller, Jr, 27.

33. *Ibid.*

34. When Johann Caspar Lavater died in 1801, a leading British periodical, *The Scots Magazine* (LXIII, 79) quite rightly acknowledged that he had been for many years, one of the most famous men in Europe. Part of his fame rested on his capable and conscientious performance of duties as a pastor and a religious writer, roles which made him loved and

respected by his fellow citizens of Zurich, who literally flocked about him in the streets. But his fame was based more firmly, albeit more questionably, on his *Essays on Physiognomy*. That this work was well-known on the continent and in England and America is common enough knowledge, but the full extent of its popularity and impact is yet to be measured. See. John Graham, "Lavater's 'Physiognomy': A Checklist," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 55, no. 4 (Fourth Quarter, 1961): 297-308.

35. J. C. Lavater, *Physiognomy, or the Corresponding Analogy Between the Confirmation of the Features and the Ruling Passions of the Mind* (London: William Tegg, 1866), 96.

36. *Ibid.*, 97.

37. *Ibid.*, 1.

38. Some scholars like Tayyab Mahmud believes that the Enlightenment period was essentially bad for people of color because Enlightenment and liberalism on the one hand, and slavery and colonialism on the other, hegemonic forces in Europe fashioned strategies of exclusion, grounded in a racial dichotomy between human and sub-human, or civilized and savage. See. Tayyab Mahmud, "Colonialism and Modern Construction of Race," *University of Miami Law Review* 53, no. 1219 (1999): 122.

39. Joe L. Kincheloe, "The Struggle to Define and Reinvent Whiteness: A Pedagogical Analysis," *College Literature* 26, no. 3 (1999): 164.

40. *Ibid.*

41. G. Herbert Renfro, *Life and Works of Phillis Wheatley* (Washington, DC: Robert L. Pendleton, 1969), 11.

42. In *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., argues that the examination of Phillis Wheatley by the Boston intelligentsia around this period was a landmark event not only for her but also the entire Black people because it fundamentally challenged the myth of the inferiority of the Black race that was prevalent during this period. He describes the examination scene as, compelling—the scenario of the Black poet and her white judges—a powerful image which powerfully encapsulates the Enlightenment-era controversies over the intellectual capacity of Black people. However, other literary scholars like Joanna Brooks disagrees with Gates' thesis. In "Our Phillis, Ourselves," Brooks challenges the image, popularized by Henry Louis Gates Jr., of Wheatley "on trial" before a jury of eighteen white male judges. Brooks argues that there was no trial and that Wheatley instead made her career by cultivating an intricate network of relationships to white women. See. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley: America's First Black Poet and her Encounters with the Founding Fathers* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2003), 5 and Joanna Brooks, "Our Phillis, Ourselves," *American Literature* 82, no. 1 (2010): 1-28.

43. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley*, 5.

44. *Ibid.*, 26-27.

45. *Ibid.*, 44.

46. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia, written in the year 1781* (Paris: Publisher not identified, 1782), 255.

47. *Ibid.*, 257.

48. This is quoted in Chas Fred Heartman, ed., *Phillis Wheatley: Poems and Letters* (Florida: Mnemosyne Publishing, 1969), 269.

49. *Ibid.*, 33.

50. Joe L. Kincheloe, "The Struggle to Define and Reinvent Whiteness," 164.

51. Daryl M. Scott, *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1880-1996* (Chapel Hill; University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 1.

52. It deserves mentioning that Scholars of Afro-pessimism/optimism have also raised questions concerning the status of Blackness within the schemes of ontology, epistemology and sociology in an anti-black world. Afro-Pessimism as a school of thought, which began to emerge at the turn of the millennium, is unsatisfied with the expanding rhetoric of a post-racial United States and the failure of existing political and cultural theories to explain what they perceived to be the continuing prevalence of racial discrimination within the United States. Pessimist authors such as Frank Wilderson and Jared Sexton began using Hartman's analysis of an anti-blackness contained in everyday scenes, rather than in moments of spectacular violence, in order to develop a critique of the constitutive role of anti-blackness for United States civil society. Instead of accepting a post-racial paradigm, Afro-Pessimism's core axiom posits that 'Black' still equals slave in the United States as well as in the Western or 'white world in general. This idea of 'Black equals slave' may also be characterized as a pessimistic reading of Blackness—because of its unyielding emphasis on the continuity of the demonization and deformation of Blackness in the world—the anti-Black world. William Henry Moore, in his work on the application of the theory of Black Consciousness to the history of Black people, argues that the idea of Blackness as an identity, is trapped in the historic formation of the notion of "slave consciousness." Such that Blackness, invariably connotes "negative identity" from a historical standpoint, because when the African slaves arrived in the new world, they were turned into a thing, a "Negro," a negative identity. It was through this created negative identity (deformed Blackness) that Black people were largely enslaved mentally and chained physically. However, Jared Sexton argues in "The Social Life of Social Death" that the idea of Black optimism is not the negation of the negation that is afro-pessimism, just as black social life does not negate black social death by inhabiting it and vitalizing it. A living death is as much a death as it is a living. Nothing in afro-pessimism suggests that there is no black (social) life, only that black life is not social life in the universe formed by the codes of state and civil society, of citizen and subject, of nation and culture, of people and place, of history and heritage, of all the things that colonial society has in common with the colonized, of all that capital has in common with labor—the modern world system. Black life is not lived in the world that the world lives in, but it is lived underground, in outer space. Ultimately, my work takes a detour from the afro-pessimist/nihilistic reading of Blackness as something that cannot be redeemed. It argues that for the redemption of Blackness through the imagination of Blackness as through a different conceptual apparatus or scheme from Eurocentric or western conceptual apparatus—Black epistemologies. See. William Henry Moore, "On Identity and Consciousness of El Hajj Malik El Shabazz (Malcolm X): Identity to the History of Black Consciousness," (PhD Diss., University of California, Santa Cruz, 1974), 72. See also. Jared Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism," *Tensions*, Issue 5 (Fall/Winter 2011): 28 and Sebastian Weier, "Consider Afro-Pessimism," *American Studies* 59, no. 3 (2014): 419-420.

53. Joseph Raz, "Authority and Justification," in *Authority*, ed. Joseph Raz (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 115-141.

54. Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 56.

55. Walter D. Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom," *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 7/8 (2009): 4.

56. *Ibid.*, 1.

57. Joseph Agnew, "Know-Where: Geographies of Knowledge of World Politics," *International Political Sociology* 1 (2007): 14.

58. Lindon Barrett, *Racial Blackness and the Discontinuity of Western Modernity* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 4. See also. Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 257-337 and Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept" *Cultural Studies* 21, Nos. 2-3 (2007): 240 – 270.

59 René Descartes, *Key Philosophical Writings*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 199), 280.

60. Although in a section of the *Discourse on Method*, Descartes acknowledges the possibility of distinction between races and in the use of 'reason,' writing that "those whose opinions are decidedly repugnant to ours are not on that account barbarians or savages [because] many of these nations make equally good, if not better, use of their reason than we do," his philosophical system which ushered in the modern period in the western cultural praxis, was used or appropriated as the ultimate maker of humankind in a racializing sense. It is generally thought that one heritage of Cartesian dualism is the separation in principle of the human mind from alleged influence of the body, whether by sex or race. Fundamentally, every human essence/ego comes from God and transcends bodily effects. So, in a framework where Blacks are categorized and described mainly through somatic features, the racializing effect of rational knowledge acquisition (and other functions of rationality) takes on a negative consequence for this group. This is a phenomenon that has been explored in scholarship on Descartes. In *Another Mind-Body Problem: A History of Racial Non-Being* John Harfouch argues that the idea of Cartesian dualism grounded in mental and bodily differences was used to fuel racism. In this work, Harfouch shows how the eighteenth-century author Arthur de Gobineau uses a genealogical dualism similar to Descartes's to justify Aryanism, showing how even a doctrine of the mind as transcendently generated by God, independent of the body, can be coopted in service of racism. See. John Harfouch, *Another Mind-Body Problem: A History of Racial Non-Being* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018), 6.

61. Richard, T. DeGeorge, *The Nature and Limits of Authority* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1985), 38.

62. Marianne Janack, "Standpoint Epistemology without Standpoint? An Examination of Epistemic Privilege and Epistemic Authority," *Hypatia* 12, no.2 (1997): 133.

63. The manner in which Zagzebski conceives of the "self" as an epistemic authority is such that there is a connection between rationality and reflective judgment as what produces harmony in the self. See. Linda Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority and Autonomy of Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 33.

64. Richard Moran, *Authority and Estrangement: An Essay on Self Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 113.

65. Kant's philosophical perspective manifests an inarticulate subscription to a system of thought which assumes that what is different, especially that which is "black, is bad,

evil, inferior, or a moral negation of “white,” light, and goodness. Kant’s theoretical anthropological edifice, then, in addition to its various conscious and unconscious ideological functions and utilities, had uncritically assumed that the particularity of European existence is the empirical as well as ideal model of humanity, of universal humanity, so that others are more or less less-human or civilized (“educable” or “educated”) as they approximate this European ideal. See. Emmanuel Eze’s “The Color of Reason: The Idea of ‘Race’ in Kant’s Anthropology,” in *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Eze (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 103-140.

66. Locke was also a strong advocate for colonialism and early forms of entrepreneurial capitalism, including the formation of a colony based on slave labor. In Locke’s *Second Treatise*, liberalism and colonialism are conceived as mutually beneficial in the promotion of progress within the empire. See. Theresa Richardson, “John Locke and the Myth of Race in America: Demythologizing the Paradoxes of the Enlightenment as visited in the Present,” *Philosophical Studies in Education* 42 (2011): 101.

67. See. John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Cambridge: C.B. McPherson, Hackett Publishing Company, 1980); Brad Hinshelwood, “The Carolinian Context of John Locke’s Theory of Slavery,” *Political Theory* 41, no. 4 (August 2013): 562-590; and James Farr, “Locke, Natural Law, and New World Slavery,” *Political Theory* 36, no. 4 (August 2008): 495-522.

68. See. Kant’s *Philosophische Anthropologie: Nach handschriftlichen Vorlesungen*, Ed. Friedrich Christian Strake (Leipzig, 1831). Emphasis added.

69. Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Outline of Ten Thesis on Coloniality and Decoloniality,” *Foundation Franz Fanon*: <http://frantzfanonfoundation-fondationfrantzfanon.com/article2360.html> Accessed on March 10, 2019, p.18.

70. Mack C. Jones also stressed the important point that those who construct knowledge for control often fails to appreciate the fact that knowledge that serves that interest of one cannot serve the interest of another. See. Mack C. Jones, *Knowledge, Power and Black Politics: Collected Essays* (New York: Suny Press, 2014), 45.

71. Tommy J. Curry elaborated more on this. In his view, when black thinkers are not seen as the primary theoreticians of their own thought, they become the unnamed casualties of disciplinary warfare—martyrs in the battles to maintain (white) philosophical legitimacy. See. Tommy J. Curry, “On Derelict and Method: The Methodological crisis of African-American Philosophy’s Study of African-Descended Peoples under an Integrationist Milieu,” *Radical Philosophy Review* 14, no.2 (2011): 139-164.

72. Angelica Nuzzo, “Epistemic Agency: A Hegelian Perspective” in *Social Epistemology and Epistemic Agency: Decentralizing Epistemic Agency*, ed. Patrick J. Reider (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 153.

73. Harold Morick, “Is Ultimate Authority a Distinguishing Characteristic of the Psychological?” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 8, no.3 (1971): 292.

74. Michael Baurmann, “Fundamentalism and Epistemic Authority” A Publication of the Tempere Club. http://www.tampereclub.org/e-publications/vol.13_baurmann Accessed October 13, 2016.

75. Richard, T. De. George, 14.

76. Linda Zagzebski, 61.

77. Molefi K. Asante and Ronald E. Hall, *Rooming in the Master's House: Power, Privilege in the rise of Black Conservatism* (London: Paradigm Publishers, 2011), 107.

78. Amos N. Wilson, *Afrikan-Centered Consciousness Versus The New World Order: Gaveyism in the Age of Globalism* (New York: Afrikan World InfoSystems, 1999), 51.

79. Walter Mignolo, "Decolonizing Western Epistemology/Building Decolonial Epistemologies" in *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy*, ed. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 23-24.

80. Mack C. Jones, 47.

81. In analytic philosophy, this problem being highlighted here may be reduced to the problem of schema and translation following the reflections of W.V. O. Quine on language, reference and symbolic representations. In other words, it could be assumed that the entrapment of non-white subjects in the colonial hegemonic schemes of whites/Europeans is primarily a function of the vagaries the linguistic properties of the language used for the expression of thoughts and for naming objects (referentially) in the world. For instance, in *Word & Object*, Quine argues that "language is a social art. In acquiring it we have to depend entirely on intersubjectively available cues as to what to say and when. Hence there is no justification for collating linguistic meanings, unless in terms of men's dispositions to respond to socially observable stimulations." So, when the social factors that influences language, in the meaning-making process, are taking into consideration, the conceptual schemes are definitely going to emit different horizons of understanding. But Quine, goes further to argue that when such a situation arises, the linguist (or the colonialist) needs to go further and impose his own meanings on the "native" terms. In *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, Quine maintains that the reason why it is hard to say how else there is to talk, is not because our objectifying pattern is an invariable trait of human nature, but because we are bound to adapt any alien pattern to our own in the very process of understanding or translating the alien sentences. He imagines, for example, a newly discovered tribe whose language is without known affinities. The linguist (or the colonialist) has to learn the language directly by observing what the natives say under observed circumstances, encountered or contrived. He makes a first crude beginning by compiling native terms for environing objects; but here already he is imposing his own patterns. However, to reduce this problematic to problem of translation is disingenuous because in the context of anti-black racism, translations and referential meanings are only fungible among the dominant, colonial and oppressive groups who wield the power to make and shift boundaries of the human based on the zone of meaning that would mostly benefit their group. So, meaning and translation of racially coded terms that have serious existential consequences, such as "negro," or "wetback," will carry similar meaning within linear group associations and not across group associations. Thus, the problem being highlighted here is not merely a problem of language but a problem of the imposition of white/European ways of thinking, mental frames on non-white/European subjects. It is an act of epistemic violence. See. Willard Van Orman Quine, *Word & Object* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1960), 1.; See also. Willard Van Orman Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 1-2.

82. Amos N. Wilson, *Afrikan-Centered Consciousness*, 49.

83. What undergirds this line of thinking is the fact that epistemic authority is grounded on the assumption of epistemic privilege. The privileged world-view and the privileged knower. See. Marianne Janack, "Standpoint Epistemology without Standpoint? An Examination of Epistemic Privilege and Epistemic Authority," *Hypatia* 12, no. 2 (1997): 125-139.

84. Jason R. Ambrose and Sabine Broeck, "Black Knowledges/Black Struggles: An Introduction" in *Black Knowledges/Black Struggles: Essays in Critical Epistemology*, ed. Jason R. Ambrose and Sabine Broeck (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 7.

85. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 119.

86. Herbert Aptheker, ed. *Pamphlets and Leaflets by W.E.B. DuBois* (New York: Krauthammer, 1986), 1.

87. Anthony Appiah, "The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (1985): 25.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid.

90. Ibid.

91. See. Eric J. Sundquist, ed. *The Oxford W.E.B. DuBois Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 39.

92. Ibid., 42-43.

93. W.E.B. DuBois, *The Negro* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970-first edition, 1915), 139-140.

94. W.E.B. DuBois, "Phylon: Science or Propaganda," *Phylon* 5, no. 1 (1944): 7.

95. Ibid., 9.

96. Anthony Monteiro, "W.E.B. DuBois and the Study of Black Humanity: A Rediscovery," *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no.4 (March 2008): 600.

97. Ibid., 603.

98. W.E.B. DuBois, "My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom," *Clinical Sociology Review* 8, no. 1 (1990): 33.

99. Ibid., 32.

100. For this claim, I rely on the research work carried out by Aldon Morris in *The Scholar Denied* which argued DuBois was the first social scientist to establish a sociological laboratory where systematic empirical research was conducted to determine the scientific causes of racial inequality. Morris considered this as an intriguing, well-kept secret regarding the founding of scientific sociology in America. The first school of scientific sociology in the United States was founded by a black professor located in a historically black university in the South. This reality flatly contradicts the accepted wisdom. However, a broad consensus exists among sociologists that the Chicago school, which emerged in the second decade of the twentieth century, was the first school of American empirical sociology. This hegemonic narrative maintains that the school's primary leader was the premier second-generation University of Chicago sociologist Robert Ezra Park. Yet although it was only occasionally articulated in the twentieth century, there is a counterview. It argues that in the first years of that century, the black sociologist, scholar, and activist W.E.B. Du Bois developed the first scientific school of sociology at Atlanta University, a historically black institution of higher learning located in the heart of Atlanta's

black community. This counterview is largely unknown in mainstream academia, for it flies beneath the academic radar, disconnected from the dominant narrative of the origins of American sociology. See. Aldon D. Morris, *The Scholar Denied: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Birth of Sociology* (Oakland, CA: University of California, 2015), 1, 2.

101. This program at Atlanta, I sought to swing as on a pivot to one of scientific investigation into social conditions, primarily for scientific ends: I put no emphasis on specific reform effort, but increasing and widening emphasis on the collection of a basic body of fact concerning the social condition of the American Negro. W.E.B. DuBois, "My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom", *Clinical Sociology Review* 8, no. 1 (1990): 33.

102. Aldon D. Morris, *The Scholar Denied*, 3.

103. *Ibid.*, 3-4.

104. *Ibid.*, 4.

105. *Ibid.*

106. W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Folk, Then and Now: An Essay in the History and Sociology of the Negro Race* (New York: Octagon Books, 1973), 210.

107. See. Eric J. Sundquist, ed. *The Oxford W.E.B. DuBois Reader*, 354-362.

108. W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Folk, Then and Now*, ix.

109. W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Study of the Problems" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 11, no.1 (1898): 10.

110. *Ibid.*, 20

111. See. Eric J. Sundquist, ed. *The Oxford W.E.B. DuBois Reader*, 355.

112. *Ibid.*, 361.

113. *Ibid.*

114. Ebony A. Utley, "Humanizing Blackness: An interview Tommy J. Curry," *Southern Communication Journal*, 81, no. 4 (2016): 266.

115. W.E.B DuBois, "The Possibilities of the Negro: The Advance Guard of the Race" in *Writings by W.E.B. DuBois in Periodicals edited by Others*, Vol.1-1891-1909, ed. Herbert Aptheker (New York: Kraus-Thompson, 1982), 161-167.

116. *Ibid.*, 161

117. The idea of Black epistemic authority would inform Du Bois' Pan-Africanism as ideological formation that seeks to bring together Black communities across the globe to demand for political, and economic rights from oppressive imperialist economies or colonial political entities such as the United States and Great Britain. In a string of essays published in *The Crisis* magazine of 1921, Du Bois argues calls for the first Pan-African Congress, designed for the interests of the darker peoples in the world. It was at the Peace Conference in Paris, February, 1919, that this call was made. Du Bois conceive of this congress as a forum that will serve the purpose of raising peoples to intelligence, self-knowledge and self-control, their intelligentsia of right ought to be recognized as the natural leaders of their groups. Du Bois' call for the Pan-African congress was inspired by his unflinching belief that genuine Black progress in an anti-black world could only be achieved through an emphasis of Black self-determination and knowledge schemes that emphasize Black intellectual and spiritual gifts. This is why he decries any attempt, intellectual or otherwise, that demonizes Blackness in any fashion. According to DuBois, "the insidious and dishonorable propaganda which, for selfish ends, so distorts and

denies facts as to represent the advancement and development of certain races of men as impossible and undesirable should be met with widespread dissemination of the truth.” The truth of knowledge of history which would show the enormous contributions of Black folks to human civilization. In *The Negritude Movement* Reiland Rabaka argues that invoking the Africana intellectual tradition, at least in its modern guise, takes us back to Du Bois, who is almost universally regarded as the preeminent intellectual of the modern African world. Arguably more than any other continental or diasporan African intellectual from the period spanning 1895 to the emergence of the Negritude movement in the mid-to-late 1930s, Du Bois’ discourse—whether via his Pan-Africanism, sociology, historiography, radical politics, poetry, short stories, or novels—was dominant and extremely influential. Part of what places Du Bois at the center of the Africana intellectual tradition in the modern moment is the fact that he consistently placed African peoples at the center of history, culture and civilization. See. W.E.B. Du Bois’ *The Crisis* 23, no.1 (November 1921):510; *The Crisis* 21, no.5 (March 1921): 198-199; Reiland Rabaka, *The Negritude Movement: W.E.B. Du Bois, Leon Damas, Aimee Césaire, Leopold Senghor, Frantz Fanon, and the Evolution of an Insurgent Idea* (New York: Lexington Books, 2015), 4; Eugene F. Provenzo and Edmund Abaka, *W.E.B. DuBois on Africa* (California: Left Coast Press, 2012); and Patricia W. Romero, “W.E.B. DuBois, Pan-Africanists, and Africa 1963-1973,” *Journal of Black Studies* 6, no. 4 (June, 1976): 321-336.

118. W.E.B. DuBois, *The Gift of Black Folk: The Negroes in the Making of America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 117.

119. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 1952), 73.

120. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Critical Fanonism,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 3 (1991): 458.

121. Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 140.

122. Sylvia Wynter, “Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the puzzle of Conscious Experience, and What It is Like to Be “Black,” in *National Identities and Sociopolitical Changes in Latin America*, ed. Mercedes F. Durán-Cogan & Antonio Gómez-Moriana (New York: Routledge, 2001), 31.

123. *Ibid.*, 60.

124. Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 31.

125. Sylvia Wynter, “Towards the Sociogenic Principle,” 31.

126. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Ricard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 15.

127. Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 40-41.

128. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 96.

129. David Marriott, *Whither Fanon? Studies in Blackness of Being* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 2.

130. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 102.

131. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER III

AGAINST MENTAL DARKNESS: FREDERICK DOUGLASS ON BLACK SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND ANTICOLONIAL EPISTEMOLOGY

And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.
John 8:32

The only solid foundations of liberty are knowledge and courage
~Frederic Holland, 1891

Frederick Douglass is one of the most revered thinkers within the Black intellectual tradition. The story of his *Life and Times of Fredrick Douglass*, written by himself as well as those written by his numerous biographers, easily portray the magnitude of the impact and legacy that Douglass had on the racial uplift of the Black race and to human civilization generally.¹ Undoubtedly, the history of the Black race in the United States, cannot be completely articulated without an acknowledgment of the place of significance that Douglass occupies within such genealogical chronicle. Douglass is exemplary in terms of the resilience that his life represents for the Black race, especially in the face of the most violent, despicable, and dehumanizing institution ever established by man—slavery. This exemplarity is concretized by his exploits towards overcoming the terrible conditions of slavery and colonial exploitation, as well as the dismantling of the myth of Black inferiority that was developed within antebellum America to justify the despicable treatment of Blacks within this period of unbridled darkness, including moral, political, spiritual and existential darkness. Yet, within the gloominess of such forms of darkness rose a giant and genius – Frederick Douglass, who explored the subtleties of

his humanity, and through autodidactic means, funneled over the bondage of darkness and brought himself to the light.

The idea of “darkness” and “light” are two important concepts that Douglass, in his numerous writings and reflections, deployed to share the vagaries, complexities, and difficulties of his lived experience from the time he was born into slavery until the time he escaped (as a fugitive slave) from the dehumanizing conditions of slavery. He deployed the concept of “darkness” to achieve both literal and metaphoric ends. On the one hand, he deployed the idea of “darkness” to denote the plethora of evil perpetrated by greedy white slave-owners and extremely brutal overseers against Blacks as well as an exposition of the virulent nature of anti-Black racism in this period. In a different sense, he utilized the notion of darkness to metaphorically depict the asinine nature of the system of patriarchy and economic greed that undergirds the sense of “profit-making” that transmogrify human beings into a commodity, with respect to viewing Black bodies as commodities to be bought and sold within the political economy of slavery in antebellum America. For instance, in “The Heroic Slave,” Douglass describes the immediate tragedy of slavery as consisting of the brutalization of men, women, and children, and generally objectifying Black souls as merely material components in a grand machine for economic gain.² In some other instance, Douglass would deploy the concept of “darkness” to castigate and ridicule the hypocritical nature of the religious outlook portrayed by those who are actively engaged in and profiting from the enterprise of slavery. On the other hand, he deployed the notion of “light” to represent the ideals of truth that drives his ultimate quest for freedom or manumission. Especially, breaking away from the chains of slavery—both mental/psychological and physical chains.

In this chapter, I explore the philosophical significance of Douglass's break away from the oppressive psychological and material conditions of slavery through certain subjective principles projected into the objective world; especially the emphasis he placed on positive dispositions of mind as a catalyst for objective self-transformation in the world. The philosophical reflection of Douglass is significant when considered from an epistemological perspective because it orients us towards a radical consideration to Black subjects as worthy, viable, reflective and thriving epistemic agents within a social framework of knowledge, practices, and belief systems that obstinately fail to consider Blacks as *Beings-in-the-world*. In other words, the example of Douglass reveals a unique perspective of the Black subject as a being that demonstrates reflective self-consciousness which is a necessary condition for the avowal of knowledge claims in the first-personal sense. The awareness of self-consciousness engenders the distinction between the subject and the object of existence in the material world, which Douglass clearly articulates in his tripartite autobiographies—*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, My Bondage and My Freedom*, and *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*.³

The Significance of Self-Knowledge for Black Subjects in the Philosophy of Frederick Douglass

Frederick Douglass is a Black thinker that has received a wide spectrum of consideration within and outside the corpus of Black intellectual history. Although tomes have been written and broad discussions are being held on the intellectual accomplishments of this Black genius, there has not been any attempt to consider Douglass as a social epistemologist. This is what is attempted in this chapter—a philosophical analysis that considers the thoughts of Douglass from the perspective of social epistemology. Even within his career as a slave, Douglass understood the connection between social knowledge and social power. On the account of Douglass, the

slave ceases to be a slave, physically and psychologically when this distinction, between the subject and object of existence, is made through the power of knowledge or self-reflective awareness. In the autobiography, the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, he spoke of how he realized that slaves (including himself) were viewed as mere objects, just as other forms of material property and they are not expected to exhibit any forms of subjective qualities of existence. This realization or awareness led him to “abhor and detest [his] enslavers.”⁴ In Douglass’s view, the chains of bondage are broken by the sheer force of determination and intellectual strength, and the light of freedom is embraced at the moment that the Black subject comes to such self-reflective awareness. In his “Address to the Colored People of the United States,” Douglass describes this as that which makes it possible for Blacks (previously enslaved Blacks) to attain the very idea of “human brotherhood.”⁵ It is how the Black slave is transformed from the category of non-human (material object) into the category of the *human* (capable of projecting his subjective reality into the world).⁶

It is imperative to emphasize that the dialectic between “bondage” and “freedom” as Douglass imagines it is not classist, or neo-Marxist, especially in the earliest periods of the development of his ideas. The fact that in antebellum America, slaves were not recognized as “humans” but owned “things” or “properties,” makes any class-based dialectical analysis of Douglass’s ideas in the Marxist sense, inapposite. In other words, for any classist analysis to be successful in looking at the condition of the Black slave within antebellum America, the case for the humanity of the enslaved Blacks would have to be accounted for; but as far as the status of Black slaves were concerned under American slavery, no humanity was involved. Also worthy of note is the fact that in the 1830s when Douglass was educating himself and honing his reading and speaking skills, through his study of the used copy of Caleb Bingham’s compilation of

speeches, *The Columbian Orator*, he was more concerned with removing the specks of ignorance that held him bound in slavery rather than offering a scientific-theoretical analysis of the political economy of slavery in the American south around the mid-nineteenth century. However, Douglass's use of dialectical references is aimed at emphasizing the idea of existential struggle which occasions the awareness of the distinction between the *subjected self* and the *objected self* that ultimately brought about the demonstration of ownership of the Black self. Thus, *it is this notion of the ownership of self* that Douglass regards as the authority of the Black-subject to avow knowledge claims in the material world.

Undoubtedly, Douglass is a quintessential figure within the pantheon of Black intellectual history or the historiography of human ideas. His thoughts, speeches, interviews and many of his writings have been cataloged in various media such as books, anthologies, monographs, and in other publication formats as well as in documentaries and docuseries. In truth, there are not many Black persons, dead or alive, that have achieved the great feats Douglass accomplished in his lifetime; which is why he is considered as one of the most important thinkers within the Black intellectual tradition. Even within the conditions of chattel slavery, one of the vilest, maddening, dehumanizing, and contemptible institutions set up to transform human beings into mechanistic brutes, Douglass strove for his liberation and the liberation of the Black race as a whole. By daring to question established hierarchical systems of power and norms of *becoming* a human, Douglass sets up the principles for attaining freedom from the systems of oppression. He also exemplifies the benefits and burdens that come with any strive or movement towards liberation from oppressive systems. Although he was conceived and born into a system of enslavement, nurtured within a framework of subversion and submission to the will of white slave owners and overseers, and groomed to embrace a life of servitude as the ultimate end or

life-goal of people of his kind, he dared to imagine himself to be something more. He strove to circumvent all of the expectations for which he was groomed and defied all expectations to become something else through his renewed sense of self-understanding.

This characterization of the legend of Douglass is consistent with how his philosophical and intellectual legacy has been characterized by numerous published scholarships. For instance, in *Frederick Douglass: A Life in Documents*, L. Diane Barnes describes Douglass as “the most prominent African American of the nineteenth century which offers a window into the history of African-Americans across much of the nineteenth century.”⁷ This view is also echoed in David W. Blight’s *Frederick Douglass’ Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee*, where Douglass is characterized as “the most influential [B]lack leader of the mid-nineteenth century [because] by the late 1850s, Douglass was already a symbolic personality, a fugitive slave who had risen from bondage and established himself as one of the foremost orator-editors of the abolitionist movement.”⁸ In *Frederick Douglass: The Colored Orator*, Frederick M. Holland portrays Douglass as “a hero whose life culminated in the complete conquest of slavery in 1865.”⁹ Graham Hodges seems to extend the logic of Holland’s argument when he argues in *Frederick Douglass: crusading the Orator for Human Rights*, that “Frederick Douglass’s exceptional oratorical talent and his remarkable ability to adapt to public speaking situations earned him the reputation of America’s most outstanding African American orator of the anti-slavery movement.”¹⁰ In *The Political Thought of Frederick Douglass*, Nicholas Buccola endeavors to capture the legend of Douglass even from a more grandeur perspective when he writes that “Douglass, like Abraham Lincoln and the American Founders, comes down to us as an almost mythic figure in our political history. He has become perhaps the most recognizable symbol of American abolitionism and the earliest defenders of equal rights for all.”¹¹

All of these communicates that “Douglass’s legacy remained as a powerful force in the African-American community and the historical chronicling of intellectual ideas.”¹² As Eric Sundquist argues in his introductory remarks to his edited collection of essays, *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*, Douglass’s greatness is exemplified by the fact that he rose against the crushing weight of slavery and racism to achieve greatness as an orator and writer, as well as his public recognition of the need for a complex construction of a new self in a new world.¹³ A review of both classical and contemporary literature on Douglass shows that his greatness as an intellectual giant is not in doubt. Although the broad spectrum of scholarship that focuses on the intellectual significance of Douglass have portrayed him as a distinguished historian, a radical fugitive slave, a gifted orator, savior of the Black race, the abolitionist, and even as an advocate for women’s suffrage, he is yet to be discussed from the perspective of a social-epistemologist.

It is important to state that this work is not the foremost attempt to consider Douglass as a philosopher. Broadus N. Butler’s essay, “Frederick Douglass: The Black Philosopher in the United States: A Commentary,” published in 1983, constitutes a landmark in terms of the consideration of the thoughts of Douglass in the philosophical arena as addressing conceptual and analytical questions from a humancentric perspective. He describes Douglass’s philosophy as a humanistic philosophy to be distinguished from any form of systematic or system-centric thought because, whether Douglass was consciously engaged in formal philosophy or making philosophical expression through poetry, speech, or literature, his Black cosmological, metaphysical, epistemological, ethical conceptions, and modalities tend in the final analysis to be humancentric thought.¹⁴ This work goes a step further than Butler’s by attempting a consideration of the significance of self-knowledge as a social epistemological category in the

thoughts of Douglass. Especially considering the legacy of Douglass's struggle to free himself from the debilitating conditions of slavery through the display of tactfulness, sage-wisdom, guile, intelligence, and self-knowledge which speaks to the importance of subjective principles of self-transformation in a social epistemic context.

In the 19th century, which was the context of Douglass's life, there was not a fully-fledged discourse of knowledge canonized as social epistemology. The dominant framing of knowledge categories during this period was that of biological racism focusing more or less on the ethnological (predominately defining the inferior) status of Blacks. As well as understanding the relations between race and human civilization. Works such as Buckner H. P. Ariel, *The Negro: What Is His Ethnological Status?*, Samuel George Morton, *Types of Mankind or Ethnological Researches* and *An Inquiry Into the Distinctive Characteristics of the Aboriginal Race of America* are exemplary in its definitive (though based on pseudo-scientific assumptions) assessment of the Blacks race as an inferior race.¹⁵ This racist theme was propagated and parroted in anthropological research on the nature of man in the twentieth century. Researchers in this field would apply the theme of 'degeneracy' as a heuristic for studying Blacks—attributing all the negative connotation available in the western tradition to Blackness. In this sphere, Blackness came to represent the epitome of racial differences and an explanation for the necessity of physical and ontological hierarchies, while providing a supreme contrast for which the western man could compare and define himself.¹⁶

Although during the period of Douglass's life, what was framed as "social epistemology," was essentially forms of biological racism, he strove through his intellectual genius and wit to be categorized as *human*, thereby challenging the false categories and general assumptions about the inferiority of the Black race. In his critical reflections and writings,

Douglass sought to make a case for Black humanity—one that could both acquire knowledge through the engagement in intellectual activities such as reading and critical engagement with social reality to challenge what is being conveyed in 19th century America as “truth” about the ethnological status of the Black race. Through such preoccupations, he laid the foundation for what would later be canonized as social epistemological discourse—discourse about how human social conditions impact on the formulation of epistemological categories and how inter-personal and intra-human communication reveals the extent to which humans rely on the self and others for knowledge attributions in the world. Contrary to the tenets of the pseudo-scientific theoretical assumptions that of earlier ethnological studies, in “The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered,” Douglass’s debunks the idea that the negro [the Black subject] is not a human. Which makes it possible for him to imagine the Black subject not only as a human but as being capable of possessing and sharing knowledge and virtue within a social milieu.¹⁷

Two Social Epistemological Postulates of Frederick Douglass

In this chapter, I argue that we can derive two plausible social epistemological postulates from the philosophical thoughts of Frederick Douglass, namely (i) the political nature of the epistemology of ignorance in a colonial context, and (ii) self-knowledge as the foundation of a Black anti-colonial epistemology. But Douglass was very clear in his thinking that Black subjects can only gain an understanding of these notions through an appreciation of the value of education which brings about genuine personal and social transformation or reform. Douglass viewed education and knowledge as a path to freedom. This is why he worked against all odds to teach himself how to read and write and continued to teach himself to gain understanding; in 1831 he bought a copy of the *Columbian Orator*, an anthology of great speeches, which he studied closely.¹⁸ As he writes in *My Bondage and My Freedom*;

When I was about thirteen years old and had succeeded in learning to read, every increase to knowledge, especially respecting the FREE STATES, added something to the almost intolerable burden of the thought—“I AM A SLAVE FOR LIFE.” To my bondage I saw no end. It was a terrible reality, and I shall never be able to tell how sadly that thought chafed my young spirit. Fortunately, or unfortunately, about this time in my life, I had made enough money to buy what was then a very popular schoolbook, viz: the “Columbian Orator.”¹⁹

Here, Douglass is referencing his earliest struggles against both the physical and psychological warfare that the conditions of slavery imposed on Black folks. He was especially detailing how his acquisition of knowledge and his exposure to learning generated an awareness of the incongruence of the system of human slavery in the United States and his newfound enlightenment. In other words, a slave is destined to be a slave for life without developing the power to question the social hierarchies and systems that make the conditions of enslavement possible. Under this imaginary, the slave remains a slave because slavery is his ascribed or assigned natural state. Just as the Egyptians claimed philosophy occurs when humans first gaze up towards the heavens, an idea erroneously attributed to the Greeks, Douglass conveyed that freedom or the incompatibility between being a slave and being free was the catalyst of philosophical reflection. Thus, Douglass provides an intimation of his understanding of ignorance as a “burden” in the colonial context that is designed to keep Black slaves perpetually enslaved within the political economy of slavery in antebellum America. Which is why he articulated that he “saw no end” to his bondage within this system, while he was wallowing in ignorance. Although he describes this as a spirit-breaking reality, he never allowed this to incapacitate him or discourage him into inaction; he acted by investing almost all of his meager life’s savings towards purchasing a book—the *Columbian Orator*—that became one of the cornerstones for both his psychological and physical freedom. In *Fredrick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* David Blight describes the *Columbian Orator* as a book that had a prophetic import in

the life of Douglass because on page after page of this text, he found the reality of his condition, as well as dreams and justifications of his escape.²⁰

To fully appreciate the genius and intellectual contributions of Frederick Douglass to the philosophical enterprise, through a social epistemological discourse, one has to take into cognizance, the context and conditions of his life which began with the slavery experience. Frederick Douglass was a slave in antebellum America. One thing that was very clear during his early life as a slave was the knowledge that he was owned as a “property”. He was not the owner of himself. In many of his reflections, he clearly articulated the sense of lack of self-ownership that undergirds the system of slavery through his sojourn in Colonel Lloyd’s plantation, while under the ownership of Mr. Auld and his wife in Baltimore, as well as the generational transference of owned slaves (considered as property) to the offspring of owners of slave plantations. For instance, in the letter he wrote on September 22, 1848 to Thomas Auld, his former slave-owner, he decried the system of slavery that makes it possible for white slave owners for own Black bodies for economic gain. In a very confrontational tone, Douglass wrote directly to Auld stating that “at this moment, you are probably the guilty holder of at least three of my dear sisters and my only brother in bondage. These you regard as your property. They are recorded on your ledger, or perhaps have been sold to human flesh mongers, with a view of filling your own ever-hungry purse.”²¹ Douglass considers this issue of lack of the status of personhood for slaves as one of the most devastating and pernicious aspects of the system of human slave-trade developed in the United States. It is a system that utterly removes the Black slave from any consideration as a human. Rather, they are considered as physical entities that exist for the cultivation and production of wealth for the greedy white “human-flesh” mongers. In *My Bondage and My Freedom* Douglass goes on to state that the grand aim of slavery always

and everywhere, is to reduce man to a level with the brute.²² However, one of the functional ways that this process of reduction is achieved is by keeping Black slaves in perpetual conditions of ignorance.

All of these speak to the erosion of the self within America's slavery system. That is, slaves are only able to be owned when all their rights to self-ownership or self-authorship are relinquished or extinguished through all forms of repressive power-systems, codes, edicts, laws, and social practices. What is being described here is what Stephan Palmié, in *Slave Cultures and the Culture of Slave* regards as the anomalous social status/condition of Black slaves under slavery.²³ It is this anomalous social condition that makes it possible for white-slave owners to institutionalize property rights in human beings, who were not able to be seen as human beings but as outsiders from the human race that deserves to be exploited, tamed, dehumanized, and killed under the most excruciating forms of violence ever imagined by man.²⁴ David B. Davis *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* has argued that dehumanization is crucial in the slave experience and that focusing on the concept of dehumanization within North American slavery is useful in recognizing that Black slaves were treated like animals throughout the hemisphere. For, Davis the dehumanization of Black slaves, a subject that lies at the center of debates over emancipation is "exemplified by the accusation that the animal-like coercive "breeding" of slaves explained the unique rapid population growth of American slaves, was confirmed by the abundant testimony of former slaves; dehumanization was central to the slave experience."²⁵ Under this imaginary, the process of dehumanization is what concretizes or perfects the erosion of the Black self within this condition of enslavement, because the white slave owner derives a sense of superiority and validation of humanity from denigrating and dehumanizing the Black slave.

Less than a hundred years after American chattel slavery, psychologists/sociologists recognized that slavery not only was a system of subjugation but had psychological and epistemological consequences for the enslaved. Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey, *The Mark of Oppression: Explorations in the Personality of the American Negro* have utilized the social-psychological model known as the ego perversion of dominance to study this phenomenon. For them, “slavery is thus the extreme manifestation of the ego perversion of dominance—the subjection of another human being to a pure utilitarian use. Once you degrade someone in that way, the sense of guilt makes it imperative to degrade the object further to justify the entire procedure.”²⁶ Since the erosion of the concept of “self” within the conditions of slavery, bears the mark of psychological oppression which affects the individual who is subjected to such a system in terms of personal adaptation as well as its effects on group associations.²⁷ Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey exposed the ethics of racialized exploitation under conditions of slavery-like oppression, emphasizing that apart from the material aspects of the exploitative, capitalist socio-economic practices in the American slavery experience, there was also the deliberate, systematic psychological degradation of Black folks by the American institution of slavery which functioned as an instrument of maintaining the status quo. They also argued that these ethics of racialized exploitation was responsible for the false projections and prognosis researchers on psychopathology in the twentieth century such as Nolan Lewis, Louis Hubbard, J.W. Babcock would project as evidence of the Black individual’s perpetual suffering from psychosis, hallucinations, and the illusions of knowledge, which are all markers of their psychological deformity.²⁸ Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey leveled criticisms against this view, maintaining that:

concerning the Negro's [Black person] comparative lack of self-consciousness and his reported tendency to draw a fainter line of demarcation between will and destiny, illusion and knowledge, and dreams and facts, and make less distinction between hallucinations and objective existences. These all await standardization of the norm for the Negro [Black person] personality in the light of the social realities that confront him.²⁹

The implication of this is that, even though these are false conclusions about Black psychopathologies, it was accepted as scientific truths in research on the nervous and mental disease to reinforce the assumption of Black inferiority in different facets of life.³⁰ As Douglass narrated, and as many other African Americans of the time attested, Black enslavement had many sides. It was a legal status; it was an ideology; it was a psychological state; it was a religious (or irreligious) value, and it was a physical act of domination.³¹

In antebellum America the epistemology of ignorance was a form of legalized violence against Black slaves. The term “epistemology of ignorance” is used here to categorize the naturalization of an unnatural state (of non-knowing) for Black slaves that is enforced through systematized, deliberate mechanisms put up by slave owners within the American institution of slavery to control and degrade millions of Black slave populations.³² A powerful manifestation of this degradation was the prevention of all Blacks from gaining access to knowledge as systemized in the American slave codes. This was aimed at preventing Black slaves from developing any sense of self or self-worth that may signal forms of rebellion against the entire system of human enslavement. This explains why education/learning was primarily restricted to humans whereas slaves were considered as non-human animals or “boons.” In the slave codes or “laws” that were promulgated in the mid-nineteenth century in the southern states in the United States, it was affirmed that due to the legal relation of master and slave, a relation which confers the administration of rights on the master, the validity or lawfulness of that relation is equivalent to a denial of the literary and religious rights of the slave.³³ That is, “the legal relation of slave

ownership, in America, as defined by the code that upholds it, is a relation that cannot and does not consist with the recognition (either in theory or practice) of the intellectual and religious rights of the slave.”³⁴ As written in chapters VI and VII, part II of the Slave Code:

The power to *permit* and to *confer* carries with it the power to *refuse* and to *withhold*. Both the master and the slave understand this, where permissions are most frequently given. It is injurious to confer, as it is degrading to accept as a boon, what belongs to every man as man, by absolute and inherent right. The rights of investigation, of free speech, of mental culture, of religious liberty, and conscience, are of this class.³⁵

This shows how “ignorance” was wielded as a legal-political tool to keep Black slaves perpetually under servitude. In this instance, the “ignorance” of the slave was a way the slave master intended for him to know the world. This was not the case of the absence of knowing it is a phenomenon that is contingent on the denial of the right to the investigation of mental culture, from which all slaves were barred. This means that if any slave were to dabble into this sort of thing, that slave and the very pursuit of such an endeavor would be deemed as outlawed and abominable.

This also suggests that ensuring that Black slaves were kept in mental darkness was a principal mechanism through which the white slave owners demonstrated not only their superiority in terms of social hierarchies, but it also served as a way of establishing and maintaining the myths of their ontological and intellectual superiority. This is why the section of the Slave Code cited above restricts *powers* to ‘confer’ or ‘withhold’ intellectual rights on the white slave owner. Yet, this phrase, “both the master and the slave understand this” in the quote above, suggests that the Black slave can demonstrate some form of understanding of their altered and inferior place under the law. If this is true, then it contradicts the very assumptions of the inferiority of Black slaves, which was the predominant worldview during this period. It also reveals the arrogance of the framers of this code, in the acknowledgment of the natural or innate

capacities possessed by Black slaves to pursue intellectual and religious concerns that could aptly be categorized as attributes of the investigation of mental culture. Douglass thus placed clearly before the Blacks and the whites of this nation the perspective and the scale by which the black struggle for freedom would have to be launched. The starting line in the battle for the liberation of Black people was to be drawn by the Blacks themselves and their resourcefulness towards this objective would have to be consistently demonstrated through waging of psychological warfare and physical acts of resistance.³⁶

Douglass on the Political Nature of the Epistemology of Ignorance in a Colonial Context—I

Fredrick Douglass understood mental darkness as the ultimate marker of colonial oppression. He divined it as a racially imposed category of unknowing which restricts otherwise sentient beings to the realm of non-human property, especially in a colonial context. From the perspective of Douglass, the epistemology of ignorance is not seen as the mere lack of knowledge or the absence of awareness of existent things, on the part of the Black subjects. Rather, he considers it as something deeper, including how “ignorance” was deployed in antebellum America as part of the political structures for determining those who could aspire to the definitive characteristics of the “human,” before the law and those who could not. He also considered how Black subjects (slaves) were prevented from being considered as “knowledgeable” as a product of a constructed epistemological reality that restricts what any slave could become “knowledgeable “about to mainly learning to obey the master and accepting the conditions of servitude as the slave’s normal reality. Within this constructed epistemological reality, the good slave is deemed as the one who knows only of servitude and subjugation and accepts this as the fact of life. Meanwhile, the bad slave is the one who refuses to accept this skewed sense of reality as a fact of life. He is the one who challenges the false logic within the

constructed epistemological reality that categorizes slaves as sub-human. By rejecting this racialized structure of reality this slave (the bad slave) becomes knowledgeable of freedom and asserts his humanity.

For instance, in the *Narrative*, Douglass asserts that one of the very first conditions that need to be achieved to turn a man into a slave is to condemn such an individual to mental darkness and make such a person wallow in stark ignorance. He writes, about this pointedly in the *Narrative* in this manner, “I have found that to make a contented slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision, and, as far as possible, to annihilate the power of reason. He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery; he must be made to feel that slavery is right; and that he can be brought to that only when he ceases to be a man.”³⁷ In other words, there has to be a transformation of a rational human into something non-rational. It is a calculated system that fundamentally denies the mental capacities of Black slaves to hasten and sustain the process of subjugation; and sometimes, violent means are employed to ensure that Black slaves were contained or restricted to this realm of epistemic ignorance. Douglass writes about this succinctly in the *Narrative*:

Every moment they [slaves] spent in that school [Sabbath school], they were liable to be taken up and given thirty-nine lashes. They came because they wished to learn. Their minds have been starved by their cruel masters. They had been shut up in mental darkness. I taught them because it was the delight of my soul to be doing something that looked like bettering the condition of my race.³⁸

From what Douglass recounts in the passage cited above, the epistemology of ignorance under the political economy of slavery is exposed as profoundly political and nuanced. Especially noting the brutal ways in which the state of “unknowing,” and “mental darkness,” are enforced and carefully constructed to achieve dual functions—to help maintain white privilege and power as well as to ensure that Black slaves internalize such epistemic oppression as the

norm. In a reception speech he delivered at Finsbury Chapel, Moorfields, England on May 12, 1846, he exposes the bound of ignorance within America's system of slavery as a brutal material and psychological warfare by avowing that:

This is American slavery; no marriage—no education—the light of the gospel shut out from the dark mind of the bondman—and he forbidden by law to learn to read. If a mother shall teach her children to read, the law in Louisiana proclaims that she may be hanged by the neck. If a father attempts to give his son a knowledge of letters, he may be punished by the whip in one instance and another be killed, at the discretion of the court. Three millions of people shut out from the light of knowledge!³⁹

Here, we see Douglass's attestation to how the law under American slavery was utilized to mobilize epistemology of ignorance as a violent political weapon to ensure that Black slaves were constrained to the realm of mental darkness, what Douglass referred to as the "darkening of the mental vision." However, Douglass's reference to the "darkening of the mental vision" is crucial for unpacking the nuanced ways in which the epistemology of ignorance functioned within America's political economy of slavery to keep Black slaves outside of the domain of knowledge as the *unrecognized embodied subjects*. This, for Douglass is the political mission of the epistemology of ignorance that undergirds the American colonial experience. Embodied subjectivity is denied to the Black slave because there was no ontological or biological basis for the recognition of the humanity of the Black slave. If the embodied subjectivity were to be recognized then, it would nullify the legal, biological (scientific), anthropological, moral, and religious arguments developed to defend and sustain America's political economy of slavery.

In fact, from a critical reading of the autobiographical reflections of Douglass, the epistemology of ignorance under this system is revealed as highly valuable not only for the sustenance of the myth of the superiority of the Caucasian race but also for the sustenance of the slave-master dialectic that was extremely crucial to maintain the system of oppression.

Douglass's exposition on this in *My Bondage and My Freedom* is quite interesting. He maintains that under the slavery system, "ignorance is a high virtue in a human-chattel; and as the master studies to keep the slave ignorant, the slave is cunning enough to make the master think he succeeds. The slave fully appreciates the saying, 'where ignorance is bliss, 't is folly to be wise.'"⁴⁰ There are two important categories or dimensions of the politics of ignorance within this system as characterized by Douglass. The first has to do with the designation of the Black slave as "ignorant" under the slave-master dialectic. Although, this assumption is held by those who wielded the power to enslave Black bodies, Douglass reveals the superficial nature of such a belief based out of a different kind of "ignorance"—the master's ignorance. This is the second dimension of ignorance that Douglass reveals here as the "real" ignorance that is happening within the slave-master dialectic even though the master is oblivious of this truth. With this analysis, Douglass is also revealing the foolishness of the so-called master who thinks he is smart but cannot detect that "the slave is cunning enough" to make him think he succeeds. In other words, even though the "knowledge" is politicized under America's political economy of slavery to project Black slaves as ignorant non-subjects, they were not truly ignorant in the epistemic sense.

The example of Douglass in combatting or struggling against the established and formalized systems designed to keep the Black slave eternally ignorant, speaks to the superior intelligence of the Black slave. His desire to learn and break away from his condition of enslavement was borne out of this struggle and his recognition of the political and epistemic functions of "ignorance" within America's political economy of slavery. This is evident in the narration of his lived experiences at the house of his former slave master Hugh Auld, whose wife, Mrs. Auld, a somewhat religious woman kindled his passion for learning. In *My Bondage*

and My, Freedom Douglass describes a scenario where Mrs. Auld was frequently reading the bible aloud around the house, especially when her husband was away; and this made him curious about how to acquire the skill to read and write even though this was forbidden by law at that time. At some point, he summoned up the courage to ask his master's wife. He describes this experience in this manner, "having no fear of my kind mistress before my eyes, (she had then given me no reason to fear), I frankly asked her to teach me to read; and, without hesitation, the dear woman began the task, and very soon, by her assistance, I was master of the alphabet, and could spell words of three or four letters."⁴¹ He did not only master the morphological formation of words in the American English language but also mastered the art of thinking through a language that had been legally forbidden to all Black subjects. It was a monumental transgression of the structural systems put in place to constrain Black subjects to an endless dwelling in mental darkness.

However, the significance of this momentous foray into learning how to read and write in the language of the master was not lost on Douglass, especially after his master, Mr. Auld vigorously rebuked his wife for attempting to teach him how to read and write, thereby potentially providing him with a pathway to break away from the realm of mental darkness which was particularly reserved for Black slaves. Douglass recounts that his master Hugh, "was amazed at the simplicity of his spouse, and, probably for the first time, he unfolded to her the true philosophy of slavery, and the necessary rules necessary to be observed by masters and mistresses, in the management of their human chattels. Mr. Auld promptly forbade the continuance of her instruction; telling her, in the first place, that the thing itself was unlawful; that it was also unsafe and could only lead to mischief."⁴² In other words, it was through his quest to gain knowledge that Douglass became aware of the "true philosophy of slavery" which

he describes as the political deployment of epistemic ignorance in antebellum America to ensure the enforcement of the rules and regulations that sustains the powers of white supremacy and the dehumanizing exploitation of Black bodies, including the destruction of Black souls.

In this instance, Douglass's discovery of the true basis of the slave-master hierarchy served as the mechanism for his motivation to dismantle the burdens of ignorance placed upon him as well as break free from the shackles of slavery. Douglass was particularly stricken by the philosophical sentiments that undergirds the things his master, Mr. Auld, said while rebuking his wife for her racialized epistemic transgressions. In the *Narrative*, Douglass memorializes his master's assertion that "a [Black slave should know nothing but to obey his master—to do as he is told to do. Learning would *spoil* the best [Black slave] in the world."⁴³ Although this assertion by Douglass's master may have had some negative impact on Douglass, knowing that his desire to gain knowledge was customarily denied and deemed summarily illegal, he did not allow this to dissuade him from his quest to transgress the realm of mental darkness. He had a positive response to this moment in his experience as a slave—it dawned on him that knowledge or learning must have some kind of liberatory potential or power which is why the slave masters forbade such to the slave. He describes both the negative and positive effects of this experience in this way:

These words sank deep into my heart, stirred up sentiments within that lay slumbering, and called into existence an entirely new train of thought. It was a new and special revelation, explaining dark and mysterious things, with which my youthful understanding had struggled, but struggled in vain. I now understood what had been to me a perplexing difficulty—to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man [used in the generic sense]. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom.⁴⁴

Truly, the redemption of the mind from any process of mental colonization or oppression does not happen *ex nihilo*. It is a careful, thoughtful, and sometimes painful (as in the case of Douglass) process that involves the conscious awareness of the schemes that enshrouds the bounds of reason and the grounds for self-affirmation in the world. It is this painful process of self-conscious probing of the conditions of oppression, both material and epistemic that Douglass refers to in his assertion that the pernicious words of his master “called into existence an entirely new train of thought.” The reference here to something new—a new frame of thinking about the world, when considered as an epistemic event exposes the political character of the epistemology of ignorance as imbrued in darkness and mysterious assumptions which projects Black humans (in the context of colonial America), as non-entities. It is this new frame of thinking that gave Douglass the understanding that “ignorance” was one of the most potent tools of colonial exploitation of Black people. Angela Davis alludes to this in her famous lecture series “Lectures on Liberation,” delivered at UCLA in the early 1970s. In her first lecture Davis points out, that “looking at American slavery system through the eyes of Douglass reveals that keeping an oppressed class in ignorance is one of the principal instruments of that system of oppression.”⁴⁵

Douglass was very clear on his analysis of ignorance as a form of epistemic oppression in antebellum America. This is aptly captured in *My Bondage and My Freedom* where he characterizes the American system of slavery as that which holds that “knowledge unfits a child to be a slave.”⁴⁶ In other words, knowledge, and slavery are considered as opposing values when it comes to Black slaves within this system of human flesh mongering and dehumanization. This revelation, because it came to Douglass at a critical moment in his life as a slave where he was pondering on why he should be a slave for life, could be considered as a grand achievement. In

other words, he was able to comprehend the fraudulent system of hierarchy or caste-system of power and the knowledge schemes created within America's political economy of slavery, as ostensibly designed to make Black people believe their subjugation or oppression as a given fact of life. The perfection of *ignorance* as a form of epistemic oppression only takes place when the Black slave come to believe and accept such categories of unknowing as *indubitable truths*. It was an astonishing discovery for a young Black slave-like Douglass who never went through any form of formal education. He describes his experience as such in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, maintaining that it was a new and special revelation for him; especially dispelling a painful mystery, against which his youthful understanding had struggled, and struggled in vain, to wit: the white power structures aimed at perpetuating the enslavement of the Black man.⁴⁷

Yet, he was relentless in his pursuit of freedom. Herein lies the overly positive project of Douglass. He was not contented with his revelation or analysis of the structures of oppression designed to keep Black folks in perpetual conditions of enslavement. He was adamant that the awareness of these structures of oppression should be the very basis for the negotiation of the conditions of his freedom—pathway from slavery freedom.

In his recent autobiographical work on Douglass, *Fredrick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*, David W. Blight correctly notes that it was through this awareness that “Douglass recollected himself awakening for the first time to the white man's power to perpetuate the enslaving of the Black man. If ‘knowledge unfits a child to be a slave,’ Douglass later wrote, then he had found the motive power of his path out, or at least inward, to freedom.”⁴⁸ What is being described here is the obstinate nature of a young Black slave whose eyes have now been opened to the light of knowledge, who then proceeded to reject everything that the system of slavery stood for, even though he was still physically held in the condition of enslavement. This

newly acquired sense of urgency and the pursuit of freedom through the liberation of his mind would largely contribute to one of the most consequential moments in the career of Douglass as a slave—the fight with Edward Covey. Douglass himself describes his battle with Mr. Covey as the turning-point in his career as a slave. He describes it as such because he believes, it rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom and revived within him a sense of his manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence and inspired him again with a determination to be free.⁴⁹

However, in *Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiya Hartman describes this episode of Douglass's battle with Covey as the search for an oppositional culture that is framed under masculinist rhetoric in his autobiography, suggesting that Douglass was more interested in “making a man (manhood rights) of himself,” rather than fighting for just his life and resisting the evils of the condition of enslavement.⁵⁰ Hartman's suggestion does not mirror the reality of life for the Black slave within the antebellum period in America where slavery completely erased the concept of ‘personhood’ or category of being for the Black slave. It becomes difficult to grasp how Hartman is reading Douglass's battle with Covey through a gendered lens when the concept of *human* or personhood is fundamentally denied to the Black slave.⁵¹ Especially when it is noted that the fight with Covey did not immediately guarantee Douglass's freedom from the condition of slavery. Based on insights provided by Douglass in the *Narrative* where he described what this experience—the battle with Covey meant for him, it should orient us towards the idea that the battle signified his attempt to reclaim and affirm his sense of self and agency that is denied under slavery. In this view, standing up to Covey becomes a turning point for Douglass because it demonstrated a moment where he was able to regain his courage and sense of agency. He also stripped away the layers of self-doubt and depression that had piled on in the brutality of his life with the slave breaker. Underneath the coats of emotional varnish, Douglass discovered a

stronger, more authentic part of himself.⁵² Also, what Douglass is espousing shows the disposition of the mind that is tearing itself away from the veil of ignorance as colonial weaponry. It is a mind that has come to the full appreciation of values such as self-knowledge, self-confidence, and self-awareness as the mechanism for transcending the bounds of epistemic oppression.

Self-knowledge as the Foundation of an Anticolonial Epistemology—II

I consider Douglass's essay, "Self-Made Man" as a treatise on Black self-epistemology for two reasons. First, it is an essay that contained one of the most sustained, written reflections of Douglass on the subject matter of self-constitution and self-formation in the transcending of the colonial schemes of epistemic and material oppression. Second, it is a reflection that exposes the role of the "self," (the liberated self) in exposing the contradictions and irrationalities of the slavery system, as pertaining to the conditions of the Black slave. That is, through the reflections of Douglass in "Self-Made Man," we see an articulation of the actual process of the transformation of the Black slave into a Black subject.⁵³ Under the system of coloniality instituted in America during the antebellum period, there was nothing like a "Black subject." It was an unacknowledged apparition—a nonexistent thing or concept. But the reality of Douglass's attainment of freedom from mental and physical enslavement through autodidactic means, ruptures all of the categories that were held as the norm during this period. What is of interest in this discourse on self-epistemology in the philosophy of Douglass, is the epistemic subversion of the colonial system of knowledge that originally excludes all Black slaves from attaining the status of a Black subject. Thus, For Douglass, self-knowledge, particularly Black self-knowledge becomes the very foundation for building or developing an anti-colonial

epistemology that is in opposition to the dominant frames of knowledge and being in the new world.

The grounding of the “self” as the foundation for building epistemic principles was very important in Douglass’s reflections because through his investigation of his life-situations, he came to understand that recognition as a viable epistemic agent is possible through personal efforts as well as building upon such personal efforts to attain a social agreement, especially in a world that perpetually refuses to consider Black people as being part of the human community.

Douglass describes the self-made man as follows:

...by the term “self-made men,” I mean especially what to the popular mind, the term itself imports. Self-made men are the men who, under peculiar difficulties and without the ordinary helps favoring circumstances, have attained knowledge, usefulness, power and position and have learned from themselves the best uses to which life can be put in this world, and in the exercises of these uses to build up worthy character.⁵⁴

In Douglass’s description of the nature of the self-made man, we see an anticolonial turn, because he subverts what has been built as “agreed” notions of the “self” (subject) in dominant epistemological thinking—especially the racialized system of epistemologies that was prevalent between the early eighteenth and late nineteenth centuries in America. The peculiar difficulties he references in the passage cited above is reminiscent of his very own struggles under the conditions which have made commentators on Douglass to suggest that he was probably referring to himself as the epistemic exemplar in terms of the cultivation of the powers of self-knowledge towards achieving anti-colonial ends. Even though the American system of slavery merely considered Black slaves as “ownable” properties; Douglass held a radical anti-slavery view that not only insists that the Black slave is human, but he went a step further to avow that the Black slave is capable of developing a worthy character. In *“Images of Frederick Douglass in the Afro-American Mind,”* Waldo E. Martin describes Douglass as “an archetypal black self-

made man. He was extremely and justly proud of his self-made success and saw himself as an example for his people to emulate.”⁵⁵ This implies that Douglass functioned, not only as a Black slave that undercuts America's political economy of slavery through an expression of epistemic freedom but also as an authoritative reference who simultaneously articulated and legitimized the Black quest for self-definition and autonomy.⁵⁶

The inter-relation of the notions of self-definition and autonomy are important aspects of the philosophy of Douglass that require further analysis. In examining “self-knowledge” as the foundation of anti-colonial epistemology, there are two dimensions of the self that can be identified, namely, the *cologenic self* and the *afrogenic self*. The *cologenic self* refers to the colonized non-subject possessing a mind that dwells in the mental darkness of ignorance created by the colonialists to enslave the colonized non-subject, under the hierarchy of being and knowledge within the dominant culture. This is the condition of the self under the circumstances of slavery as described by Douglass; it is a notion of self, that cannot express any true sense of self-consciousness, self-authorship, or self-ownership—the absence of any references to human attributes of subjective experience. The genius and intellectual gifts within this dimension of the self are already prematurely assumed to be aborted due to the display of intellectual arrogance, stark violence, and other brutal schemes employed within the dominant culture to ensure that epistemic control always belongs to external forces rather than to internal forces of Being. In this case, the world, as imagined, is already “othered” and racialized while the biological formations that are deemed to be outside of the dominant culture’s terms of reference are considered as less formed and non-viable non-subjects. In other words, the *cologenic self* cannot, under normal circumstances, express the logic of self-thinking that is necessary for a self-avowal because the

self is already owned or “colonized” through material and psychological means of warfare, including the epistemology of ignorance.

However, the *afrogenic self* is the contradiction of the *cologenic self*; it is the self that can only exist through the absolute inversion of colonial logics and the transmutation of the sub-human categories of unbeing projected unto “othered” bodies (such as Black slaves) in the context of American slavery. The *afrogenic self* is non-conforming to the ethos of colonialism, which makes it an emerging anti-colonial subject. The *afrogenic self* is the Black subject who can experience an epistemological awakening. When the *afrogenic self* fully emerges as the anti-colonial subject, he can demonstrate an awareness of a difference between the internalized world of the self and a world outside of the self (the colonial world) to which his mental states are directed. He is then capable of constant self-remaking as a developed epistemic subject that avows knowledge claims and postulates epistemological categories in the world. This notion of the *afrogenic self* is consistent with what Douglass characterizes as the self-made human—specifically referring to the Black subject. Since Douglass understood mental darkness—the realm of the *unknowing Being*, as a mark of colonial oppression, throughout his life and times, he strove and worked to develop a distinctive notion of Black self-epistemology that was directed at developing the political consciousness of Black folks and marshaling ideas towards the future of the Black race.

Douglass is an archetypal example of the *afrogenic self*. He painstakingly strove to establish himself as a worthy epistemic agent even within a colonial system that ferociously prevented people like him from coming to such terms of self-discovery. This process of self-discovery requires conscientious effort, even humiliating efforts as in the case of Douglass. As Douglass describes in the *Narrative*, “though conscious of the difficulty of learning without a

teacher, I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read.”⁵⁷ Douglass had to sometimes give away his derisory lunch to white boys who were his playmates, to learn from them. One can only imagine such difficulty in the condition of slavery where the rations apportioned to slaves were mostly inadequate. He had to devise various schemes and subterfuge to secretly learn to read and write without getting caught. He also risked being in contravention of the law, knowing the stiff consequences that might befall him, if his secret efforts to acquire knowledge were discovered. So, he was conscious of the fact that this was going to be an arduous task to achieve for the individuals he describes as self-made men “who owe little or nothing to birth, relationship, friendly surroundings; to wealth inherited or to early approved means of education; who are what they are, without the aid of many of the favoring conditions by which other men usually rise in the world and achieve great results.”⁵⁸ Thus, Douglass highlights the price that can be derived from the display of the fruits of self-knowledge even in conditions that are not all that favorable. It is an allusion to the courage to resist the structures of oppression even though there has to be some price to pay.

Following Douglass, it is only when the Black subject achieves self-knowledge that the experience of genuine freedom can truly emerge. This notion of genuine freedom entails the ability to think for themselves, while not appealing to standards of thinking that excludes them from the community of humans. It is important to also emphasize that Douglass does not see Black self-knowledge as an immutable epistemic category that does not require further work on the part of the *afrogenic self*. Douglass emphasizes the necessity of remaking oneself by affirming one’s intellectual genius and epistemic authority to challenge such politicized and racialized categories that are designed to put Blackness outside of the limits of knowledge. In this regard, Douglass’s mind must be understood in its historical milieu. His thoughts can be

divided into different but interrelated categories. First, as a Black man, Douglass presented a Black, as well as humanist, perspective on America and its enduring racial quagmire. Second, his thought and life showed him constantly grappling with practical ways to alleviate the degradation of Blacks in antebellum America. Third, as a social reformer, he explored avenues to eradicate injustice and to humanize institutions and social relations. Fourth, his introspective nature as well as his keen awareness of his historical importance forced him to explore the larger significance of his life, notably his public personality. Douglass's ability to illuminate major contemporary social and intellectual currents through the prism of his own experience characterized his intellectual odyssey. As a result, his mind spoke profoundly to the dilemma of being Black in nineteenth-century America.⁵⁹

Self-knowledge in Frederick Douglass's philosophy is not merely about the constitution of the "abstract" self. Rather, it is a notion of self-understanding that is supposed to bring about transformational conditions or qualities in the world. It involves a sense of recognition that the self-in-the world is both a material entity and can display mental capabilities as human; it is a healthy sense of self-ownership that is void of the emptiness to which the self is described concerning Blackness under colonial-hegemonic imaginary. One thing that is very pronounced throughout the philosophical corpus of Douglass is this idea that the development of a healthy sense of self-knowledge is crucial in negotiating the bonds of captivity and freedom, as well as countering the false and dehumanizing narratives that the American Colonization Society have projected onto Blacks. In the address he delivered at the Great Anti-Colonization meeting in Rochester, New York on July 5, 1852, Douglass confronted the (il)logic of American Colonialism thus:

The American people have been accustomed to regard us as inferior beings. The Colonization Society has told them that we are inferior beings and that in consequence of our calm and tame submission to the yoke which they have imposed upon us; to their chains, fetters, gags, lashes, whipping-posts, dungeons and blood-hounds, we must be regarded as inferior—that there is no fight in us, — and that is evidence enough to prove that God intended us to retain the position we now occupy.⁶⁰

Here, Douglass was challenging the ethnological, anthropological, legal, and religious arguments used by the American Colonization Society to justify the enslavement of Blacks and peddle the mythological narratives of Black inferiority as mainly concocted to achieve nefarious ends.

Much of the activities of Douglass as part of the abolitionist movements in the North East as well as in England was directed at challenging these false narratives held as epistemic truths, even among Black slaves. On numerous occasions, he spoke in favor of resolutions condemning slavery and also delivered inspiring denunciations of the American Colonization Society. He was particularly interested in using his knowledge and oratorical skills to speak to the condition of Black folks, as way to help them reject the fundamental assumptions of Black inferiority which he felt was the cardinal ideal upon which the slavery system was built. For instance, in a speech he delivered before the Abolitionist Society on March 1839, he argued that Black slaves should and must see themselves as American citizens, born with natural, inherent and just rights; and that the inordinate and intolerable scheme of the American Colonization Society to deny their humanity, should never entice or drive them from developing a sense of self and belonging, in the new world.⁶¹

For Douglass, the attainment of personhood (ownership of oneself) or its lack of attainment thereof, is what signifies the threshold between slavery and freedom. The slave is only able to continue in the career of slavery because there is an understanding that the self is owned by the other rather than the self. In this case, the will of the slave will always be subject to

the will of the other (master/overseer); that is, there is absolutely no trace of agential control over the processes of the mind or the evidence of thought. The only acceptable trajectory of action for the Black slave is primarily derived from the other, anything else apart from this is considered unacceptable and met with severe punishment. This was the case with the white overseer named Mr. Gore and the Black slave, Demby that Douglass talked about in chapter four of the *Narrative*. This is how Douglass described Mr. Gore, “[o]verseers will sometimes indulge in a witty word, even with the slaves; not with Mr. Gore. He spoke to command, and commanded but to be obeyed; he dealt sparingly with his words, and bountifully with his whip, never using the former where the latter would answer as well.”⁶² What this suggests is that for the slave/caste system to be sustained, those who wield power must demonstrate absolute control, and its enforcement is necessary to maintain the evil and violence of the system of enslavement.

In one of the most grotesque representations to be found in Douglass’s first autobiography, he memorializes the violent response that Mr. Gore put up against Demby, the Black slave for attempting to express his own will or agency within the system of slavery.

Douglass has this to say further about Mr. Gore:

His savage barbarity was equaled only by the consummate coolness with which he committed the grossest and most savage deeds upon slaves under his charge. Mr. Gore once undertook to whip one of Colonel Lloyd’s slaves, by the name of Demby. He had given Demby but few stripes, when, to get rid of the scourging, he ran and plunged himself into a creek, and stood there at the depth of his shoulders, refusing to come out. Mr. Gore told him that he would give him three calls, and that, if he did not come out at the third call, he would shoot him. The first call was given. Demby made no response but stood his ground. The second and third calls were given with the same result. Mr. Gore then, without consultation or deliberation with any one, not even giving Demby an additional call, raised his musket to his face, taking deadly aim at his standing victim, and in an instant poor Demby was no more. His mangled body sank out of sight, and blood and brains marked the water where he stood.⁶³

In this passage, Demby was trying to exert his own will within a system that does not recognize such from a Black *unknowing being* or *non-existent* subject. Within such a system, there is only one true will, and that is the will of the master. Thus, the Black slave lacks all sense of control over himself because he had been acquired and purchased as the “legal” property of the slave owner. It is interesting to note that, in this extreme case, between Mr. Gore and Demby, death is the ultimate consequence of a Black slave trying to display any form of consciousness or the control of the self under such a violent system of dehumanization. One can argue, philosophically, that for Blacks in debilitating conditions of dehumanization, death is always seen as a form of “escape,” the negation of unfreedom, and the final act to transcend all forms of anti-black violence that seeks to perpetually destroy Black lives. Even Douglass was aware that death was one of the possible consequences of his attempt to escape American slavery, yet he forged ahead courageously until he finally succeeded. We see a very vivid representation of how Black slaves literarily have to struggle against death in his fictional representations of the travels of Madison Washington (one of Douglass’s original slave names) in *The Heroic Slave*.

In *The Heroic Slave*, Douglass painted a picture consisting of the inter-relatedness of the question of freedom and the reality of the death of the Black slave. As he writes, the Black slave looks at the conditions of the birds of the air and contemplates his condition of unfreedom; this then necessitates raising questions of this kind; “but what is the freedom to me, or I to it? I am a *slave*, —born a slave, an abject slave, —even before I made part of this breathing world, the scourge was platted for my back; the fetters were forged for my limbs.”⁶⁴ The bounding of the limbs with fetters, as practiced within America’s political economy of slavery, and reimagined here highlights the condition of finality and absolute control that subjects the will of the self to that of the powerful other. Which means, it is the only condition for which Black slaves were

“allowed” to be alive. So, invariably to make any negotiations or any attempt to go beyond this, would amount to inviting death. Douglass alluded to this in *The Heroic Slave* when he writes about the piteous cries of the Black slave, saying:

I am galled with irons; but even these are more tolerable than the consciousness, the *galling* consciousness of cowardice and indecision. Can it be that I *dare* not run away? *Perish the thought*, I *dare* do any thing[sic.] which may be done by another. When that young man struggled with the waves *for life*, and others stood back appalled in helpless horror, did I not plunge in, forgetful of life, to save his? The raging bull from whom all others fled, pale with fright, did I not keep at bay with a single pitchfork? Could a coward do that? *No, —no, —I wrong myself, —I am no coward. Liberty I will have, or die in the attempt to gain it.*⁶⁵

When Douglass talks about doing things for oneself, “which may be done by another,” he is referencing the courage to exhibit the elements of consciousness and self-hood even if it means that one has to die to achieve it. Also, how he describes the heroic slave above, suggests that the inalienable rights of Black people are not self-evident but dependent on the acknowledgment of those rights from other governing structures. In short, rights are politically rather than naturally endowed, including the right to life.⁶⁶

But in the case(s) where the Black slave can escape death while striving towards freedom, Douglass emphasized the importance of self-affirmation and self-knowledge. In discussions about self-knowledge in contemporary epistemology, the concept is often associated with ideas such as an individual’s awareness of their sensations, thoughts, beliefs, and other mental states.⁶⁷ But Douglass’s allusion to the concept of self-knowledge is not restricted to the same abstract formulations of mental properties concerning knowledge of the self. Douglass’s notion of self-knowledge includes a process of epistemic transformation (thoughts, dispositions, and beliefs) that leads to other practical ends—the achievement of freedom from the system of slavery and other forms of anti-black oppression. It is a functional rather than an abstract sense of self-knowledge. This is demonstrated in Douglass’s letter to his former slave master, Thomas

Auld on September 3, 1848. In this letter Douglass tells Auld, “I am myself; you are yourself; we are two distinct persons, equal persons. What you are, I am. You are a man, and so am I.” God created both and made us separate beings. I am not by nature bound to you, or you to me. Nature does not make your existence depend upon me, or mine to depend upon yours.”⁶⁸ He is articulating a sense of self-ownership that necessitates a sense of self-knowledge that is unwarranted under the conditions of slavery.

Of course, it helps that Douglass is writing this to his slave master after he had successfully escaped from slavery and his freedom had been purchased by his supporters in England. This background also shapes how he was making these demands from his former slave master. He goes further to say the following to his former master, “we are distinct persons, and are each equally provided with faculties necessary to our individual existence. In leaving you, I took nothing but what belonged to me, and in no way lessened your means for obtaining an *honest* living. Your faculties remained yours, and mine became useful to their rightful owner.”⁶⁹ So Douglass is clear here that he is now reclaiming his faculty; he is reclaiming his previously subjugated self under slavery; he is now the absolute authority over the content (thinking) of his mind and he is, above all else, just like his master, *human*. This is an account of self-epistemology from a Black perspective that arrives at the concept of the Black human which is a category that was denied to all Black subjects under the American system of coloniality. Thus, for Douglass, the Black subject becomes a reformed “human” or “Being;” it is a thing that *is* and is constantly *becoming*. This explains why Douglass extends his notion of self-knowledge to the idea of social reform.

Douglass on Literacy, Self-Knowledge, and Social Reform

When we find a man who has ascended heights beyond ourselves; who has a broader range of vision than we and a sky with more stars in it than we have in ours, we may know that he has worked harder, better and more wisely than we. He was awake while we slept. He was busy while we were idle and he was wisely improving his time and talents while we were wasting ours.

~Frederick Douglass, 1893.

One of the things that Douglass stressed in many of his writings is the importance of literacy for the development of self-knowledge and the unleashing of Black agency in overcoming the conditions of liminality that adamantly confronts Black lividity in the world, especially during the time of slavery. Despite laws and customs in slave states in America, prohibiting enslaved people from learning to read and write, a small percentage managed, through ingenuity and will, to acquire a degree of literacy in the antebellum period. Access to the written word, whether scriptural or political, revealed a world beyond bondage in which African Americans could imagine themselves free to think and behave as they chose. Literacy provided the means to write a pass to freedom, to learn of abolitionist activities, or to read the Bible. Because it most often happened in secret, the very act of learning to read and write subverted the master-slave relationship and created a private life for those who were owned by others. Once, literate, many used this hard-won skill to disturb the power relations between master and slave, as they fused their desire for literacy with their desire for freedom.⁷⁰ Such is the case of Douglass. He was never content to be a slave once he began to learn how to read and write; literacy opened new windows of opportunity and visions of a world better than that of enslavement. In his autobiographies, Douglass narrated how he wrote freedom papers for himself and other slaves in his first but failed attempt to escape from slavery. So, in the context of antebellum America, to acquire the skills of literacy for Black slaves is not only the gateway to

self-knowledge but also the gateway to freedom. In his adult years (post-slavery and abolitionist years), Douglass came to see literacy as power and illiteracy as mental darkness.⁷¹

With this understanding, Douglass was critical of the practice of Christianity in antebellum America, to further keep Black slaves in mental darkness. He was appalled to find out from what he had read from the scriptures that the so-called slave owners who refer to themselves as “Christian,” were not truly Christians they were hypocritical evildoers who hide under the cloak of religion to perpetuate the most gruesome inhumanity of man against man. Especially when Douglass recollected that it was the frequent hearing of his mistress’ reading of the Bible aloud, especially when her husband was absent, that awakened his curiosity in respect to this *mystery* of reading and roused in him the desire to learn. He could not bring himself to terms with the apparent contradiction with the practice of slavery in America, especially as he describes the practices of those who identify as “Christians,” in the slave states as the most vicious and oppressive. The apparent contradiction consists in the common description of Christianity as a religion that was supposed to bring light and salvation to the world, but Douglass was deeply troubled to find out that this religion denied the “gift” of knowledge to Black slaves—a form of epistemic violence to ensure that they remain in eternal mental and physical darkness. For instance, Douglass writes thus in the *Narrative*:

I assert most unhesitatingly, that the religion of the south [Christianity] is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes,—a justifier of the most appalling barbarity,— a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds,—and a dark shelter under, which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slaveholders find the strongest protection. Were I to be again reduced to the chains of slavery, next to that enslavement, I should regard being the slave of a religious master the greatest calamity that could befall me. For all slaveholders with whom I have ever met, religious slaveholders are the worst. I have ever found them the meanest and basest, the most cruel and cowardly, of all others.⁷²

This passage contains one of the strongest critiques that Douglass leveled against the practice of hypocritical Christianity in his autobiographies. However, this critique is not merely directed at the personal or moral flaws of individual slave owners, he was making a structural critique on how the Christian religion excludes the Black slave from being given any human or moral consideration.⁷³ Douglass was able to formulate these critiques upon gaining the power of knowledge or literacy which opened his eyes to the underside or underbelly of the anti-black racism at the foundation of America's racist discrimination against Black slaves. He was so troubled by this newfound knowledge that he asserted that it was his "unhappy lot not only to belong to a religious slaveholder but to live in a community of such religionists."⁷⁴

This background serves as a springboard for his appreciation of literacy as necessary for acquiring the power of knowledge, the liberatory power of knowledge to free oneself from the embers of slavery. The more he read, the more he was led to abhor and detest slavery and his enslavers. In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass made an emphasis on the power of knowledge when he said this about himself:

As I read, behold! the very discontent so graphically predicted by Master Hugh had already come upon me. I was no longer the light-hearted, gleesome boy, full of mirth and play, as when I landed first in Baltimore. Knowledge had come; light had penetrated the moral dungeon where I dwelt; and, behold! there lay the bloody whip, for my back, and here was the iron chain; and my good, *kind master*, he was the author of my situation.⁷⁵

In this description, the metaphor "knowledge is light" holds true; it was a kind of enlightenment that is fundamentally rooted in a genuine or authentic sense of the self; it was also a kind of knowledge that demands self-appraisal and self-understanding for any positive human values to be cultivated, even in conditions of enslavement. It was also a kind of awareness that generates a frank assessment of one's place in the world. As Douglass describes further:

The revelation haunted me, stung me, and made me gloomy and miserable. As I writhed under the sting and torment of this knowledge, I most envied my fellow slaves their stupid contentment. This knowledge opened my eyes to the horrible pit and revealed the teeth of the frightful dragon that was ready to pounce upon me, but it opened no way for my escape.⁷⁶

Thus, Douglass is emphasizing that literacy, by necessity, challenges mental darkness and generates a new kind of internal struggle between the old self and the new self—cognitive dissonance. As Douglass was undergoing such cognitive dissonance, he was conscious of its contradictions and complexities and how that realization in itself can be troubling. Slavery taught him the value of both negative liberty and self-ownership.⁷⁷ Yet, he believed that is the subject that can withstand such temporary moments of “crisis” that would eventually transcend or escape from it. That is, there is a reformist bit to the process, that once awakened by the silver trump of knowledge, one’s spirit will become roused to eternal wakefulness or liberty. This what Douglass considers as the inestimable birthright of every man which converts every object (objectified human) into an asserter of this great right.⁷⁸

In his philosophical reflections, Douglass was very clear about how literacy and gaining knowledge was going to be crucial to liberate not only himself but also the entire Black race from the shackles of slavery. In combatting his ignorance, in resisting the will of his master, Douglass, apprehends that all men should be free, and thus deepen his knowledge of slavery, of what it means to be a slave, what it means to be the negative counterpart of freedom.⁷⁹ This became his existential preoccupation and a cause for which he devoted a larger part of his life. David Blight argues that “gaining knowledge—through experience, and now so importantly through what he called the art of writing—became young Douglass’s reason for living.”⁸⁰ Upon becoming literate and upon the acquisition of the power of knowledge, Douglass became an educator and a social reformer. He was so appalled and traumatized by the contradictions that

Christianity represented during the time of slavery that he teamed up with other learned and intelligent slaves, while still enslaved, to start an underground school or what he described as a “Sabbath school.” Douglass described the conditions of the school as well as the scholars that were enrolled:

These consisted of myself, Sandy Jenkins, and Handy Caldwell. Henry and John were quite intelligent, and in a very little while, after I went there, I succeeded in creating in them a strong desire to learn how to read. This desire soon sprang up in others also. They very soon mustered up some old spelling-books, and nothing would do but that I must keep a Sabbath school. I agreed to do so, and accordingly devoted my Sundays to teaching these my loved fellow-slaves how to read...it was understood among all who came, that there must be as little display about it as possible.⁸¹

Douglass’ passion for liberation or freedom for both himself and his race was so overwhelming that he was willing to risk his life to start an underground school, which was a crime, during this period that could have cost him and his collaborators their lives. This is what necessitates the set-up of this school not at the church or other public places, but at the house of another Black man who was sympathetic to the cause. As Douglass describes it himself:

I held my Sabbath school at the house of a free colored man, whose name I deem it imprudent to mention; for should it be known, it might embarrass him greatly, though the crime of holding the school was committed ten years ago. I had at one time over forty scholars, and those of the right sort, ardently desiring to learn. They were of all ages, though mostly men and women. I look back to those Sundays with an amount of pleasure not to be expressed. They were great days to my soul. The work of instructing my dear fellow-slaves was the sweetest engagement with which I was ever blessed.⁸²

Through revelations of this nature in the *Narrative*, Douglass takes us through a journey of a people—the journey towards self-knowledge, self-transformation, and the journey towards finding themselves within a system that describes them as lost souls.⁸³ It also shows the personal sacrifices and the altruism of Douglass to spread the “gift” of literacy to other Black slaves, to create a community of knowers whose embodied subjectivity as Blacks in the world are not only

recognized but affirmed unwaveringly. This is why James Matlack's assessment in "The Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass," is apposite in noting that although the genre of writing known as autobiography, especially in America, usually describes the making of a man (human), Douglass' *Narrative* tells such a story in an unusually profound and literal way. The central movement of the book is a process of liberation. There are two essential components in this process - literacy, to gain awareness of his selfhood; and resistance, to assert his personhood. Paradoxically, Douglass had to liberate himself psychologically before he could attempt to become free and liberate others as well.⁸⁴

In other words, through his efforts and the support of other "enlightened" slaves, Douglass was able to create a community or social circle of knowledge that was specifically focused on the sharing and transference of Black knowledge through the emphasis of literacy in the underground school. The struggle for literacy among Black slaves during this period was primarily focused on both individual and social transformation of the conditions of Black folks. However, for Douglass personally, as we see in different accounts he provided in his autobiographies, the struggle for literacy, for command over the power of words, was the first stage of his escape from oppression. Without the power of language and the self-affirmation which it opened to him, Douglass might not have been able to survive and to sustain his will to escape. If literacy and self-awareness represent the crucial first step in Douglass's liberation, then active resistance was the next stage in securing his freedom—that is, the imaginative creation of a self in opposition to slavery was a gesture which prefigured his escape.⁸⁵ This notion of escape is both psychological and physical. It is the realization that thinking and navigating the world through personal knowledge and control over the process of consciousness is the very first condition of humanity; this is why it was very important for Douglass to transfer this knowledge

to other slaves to free them from the bonds of ignorance and other institutional obstacles to their epistemic freedom.

This is very important to note that Douglass's idea of self-epistemology or conception of the self or Black self-hood, is transitional but not fixed. This notion of a social epistemology that is always in transition was very apparent in his reflections and writings on the significance of Black knowledge and Black education to social reform. It is also important to note that the changes in the narratives, naturally reflect Douglass's changing concerns as his life proceeds; his changing conception of the story he lives changes the narrative of that life, the meaning he draws from it, and the implicit philosophical, epistemological and moral framework he hopes the autobiographical narratives will support.⁸⁶ In other words, the epistemological trajectory of Douglass's philosophy of education, when considered through an experiential lens, has to be seen as a process philosophy—constantly being worked and reworked, according to the demands of liberty. Since Douglass considers education as a fluid activity and one that should be persistently structured to meet human needs (particularly for Black subjects), education remained a central aspect of his life philosophy as well as his social reform philosophy. He believed that education was a lifelong and experiential activity, besides merely seeing as an engaging intellectual activity, he taught of it as a process aimed at self-realization and social betterment. In a sense, then, the goals of education reflected those of social reform: the liberation of the human spirit and the actualization of human potential. As he understands it, education means emancipation; it means light and liberty. It means the uplifting of the soul of man (Black folks) into the glorious light of truth, the only light by which men can be free. This is why he considered the denial of education to Black people (or persons generally) as one of the greatest crimes against humanity because it means that people were being denied the means of freedom

and the rightful pursuit of happiness, and to defeat the very end of their being. They can neither honor themselves, no their Creator.⁸⁷

In an address Douglass delivered in Washington, D.C., 20 November 1883, entitled “It Moves,’ or the Philosophy of Reform,” he articulates what he means by the philosophy of social reform:

I am to speak to you of the Philosophy of Reform. According to the dictionary, and we are bound to adhere to the truth of words, the word reform is defined, ‘to put in a new and improved condition; to bring from bad to good; to change from worse to better.’ This is true, apply it as we may; whether it be self-reform, social reform, national reform, or reform in any direction whatever.⁸⁸

In this characterization, it is evident that Douglass does not see “social reform” as something that is stagnated but a series of events, ideas, or human strivings that initiates certain transitional phases, moving from one condition to another in some positive trajectory. He applied this concept of social reform to the condition of the Black folk by looking at how they transformed themselves from worse conditions of slavery through the acquisition of literacy and the power of knowledge, that led to the achievement of better conditions of life, in and post-slavery. This is why Douglass argues that in whatever else Blacks may have been a failure, they have, in one respect, been a marked and brilliant success. This is in how they have managed by one means or another to make themselves one of the most prominent and interesting figures that now attract and hold the attention of the world.⁸⁹

Douglass also deployed his idea of the philosophy of reform to encapsulate both the personal and social dimensions of positive change that is experienced by man in society. As it has been well documented in this chapter, the personal aspects of Douglass’s philosophy of reform were more focused on Blacks achieving mental freedom from slavery, especially during his earlier years. But in his later years, Douglass came to realize that even after Black folks were

able to free themselves from the physical bondage of slavery, the psychological bondage of slavery was more difficult to overcome. Whereas his early social reform philosophy displayed a more traditional religious belief in the divine determination of human affairs, his later and more mature philosophy displayed a liberal religious belief in the human determination of human affairs.⁹⁰ He describes this in “Let the Negro Alone,” a speech he delivered in New York on May 11, 1869. According to Douglass, “Slavery, to be sure, is abolished. The legal relation between master and slave is abolished. The legal relation of master and slave is abolished; but that out of which slavery sprung, that by which it was sustained, the selfishness, the arrogance of the master, still remain; the ignorance and servility of the slave, and the arrogance of the master, with his custom to bear sway over his fellows remain.”⁹¹ This is what inspired most of his efforts towards socially reforming Black communities within antebellum America. He considered this as his solemn duty; as he articulates in *The Life and Times of Fredrick Douglass*:

I have earned the reputation of being a sensible man. Then is it likely that ambition could seduce me away from the enjoyment of these desirable things? There is something greater, more potent, than ambition that sways the actions of conscientious men. It is duty. Duty has been the moving power that has influenced all my actions during all the years of my life. In the past it gave me courage to face the howling mob while contending for the freedom of my people. In the present, it gives me courage to endure the abuse of foes, even as it gives me charity for the acts and sayings of those of my people who oppose and assail me. So far as the latter are concerned, I console myself with the knowledge that all of them should be my friends.⁹²

Douglass was not exaggerating when he says that it was this duty that has influenced all of his actions during the years of his life—from slavery to his post-slavery years. His efforts at public speaking in England and the United in the latter parts of the nineteenth century, as well as his publishing efforts in his newspaper, *The North Star* (established in 1847 with Martin R. Delaney as co-editor), was strongly driven by this sense of duty—duty towards the uplift of the Black race. Douglass asserts in *The Life and Times of Fredrick Douglass* that his sixteen years’

experience as editor and publisher of his paper, and the knowledge of the toil and anxiety which such a relation to a public journal must impose, caused a strain in the wishes of his friends and counselors. But regardless of this, he went to Washington, and threw himself into the work, hoping to be able to lift a standard at the national capital, for his people, which should cheer and strengthen them in the work of their improvement and elevation.⁹³ Here, Douglass again overtly demonstrates the importance he placed on the racial uplift of the Black race through his efforts at social reform. He was unrelenting in this duty because he believed that Black folks will never be respected among fellow until there is the growth of a Black intelligent class. Until Blacks can present themselves as an intelligent class, not as the underclass—mere hewers of wood and drawers of water—to which they are constrained, they shall forever be a despised race in the eyes of the dominant race.⁹⁴

Thus, in the philosophy of Douglass, self-knowledge, literacy, and social reform should be geared towards both the personal and social transformation of the conditions of Black folks. Although the struggle towards the attainment of knowledge was personal for Douglass, he was interested in extending this commitment he had towards the acquisition of knowledge to others. This implies that for Douglass, the preeminent race leader, consequently, there existed no separation between his personal identity and his racial duty. He personalized and internalized the collective black struggle; he personified his people's cause.⁹⁵ This is why Douglass can be referred to as the quintessential Black philosopher and social reformer. The collective Black struggle is considered in this chapter as the struggle for knowledge to achieve personal and social transformation. The philosophy of Douglass is exemplary in this regard. Douglass once described the process of reform as a kind of Jacob wrestling with the angel for larger blessings. According to the Christian metaphor, reform was inseparable from man's innate desire to

improve his life. Besides improvement in man's personal condition, the concerted pursuit of social reform meant, Douglass stated, working to realize the best in man's moral, intellectual, and social universe. Social reform thus encompassed concern for society as well as the individual.⁹⁶ What is being emphasized here are the personal and social dimensions of Douglass's conception of social epistemology and its practical implications for different kinds of subjects within the community of "knowers."

In his social epistemological thought, Douglass also emphasized the power of truth as a vehicle to be deployed by the social reformer towards achieving social change. For instance, in "The Union and How to Save It," Douglass insists that the truth of slavery and its effects on African Americans in the new world, had to be spelled out and acknowledged by the white power structure before any meaningful progress could be made in their abolitionist efforts. He affirms that slavery must be described for what it is, as "the disease, and its abolition in every part of the land is essential to the future quiet and security of the country. Any union which can be patched up while slavery exists must either completely demoralize the whole nation, or remain a heartless form, disguising, under the smiles of friendship, a vital, active, and ever-increasing hate, sure to explode to violence."⁹⁷ So, Douglass is unimpressed by pretentiousness when dealing with the oppression of the Black race because he believed that truth symbolized the light of the world and that social reform like truth, was both a rational and an intuitive phenomenon. Truth and the imperative of social reform, he argued, were equally apparent to tutored and untutored minds, to the head and to the heart, to reason and to intuition.⁹⁸ This is why Douglass strongly believed that the groundwork for the achievement of freedom for Black folks had to start with mental freedom—to unchain their minds from the hegemonic structures that have been built to keep them incapacitated as well as a destruction of the beliefs that Black people have held as

unquestionable and intuitive percepts for life. This preoccupation transverse the different epoch of his life.

Early in his social reform career, Douglass sincerely believed that the social reformer has to rely almost exclusively upon the intuitive agency and power of truth as a mechanism for progressive change.⁹⁹ He did not have many external forces to rely on as he was building his intellectual capacities rather than a few textual resources, the Bible, and other materials he was able to solicit from some of his playmates. This was the context in which Douglass explored his intuitive agency towards achieving personal reform—he would later deploy the same approach towards social reform of other Black folks. Douglass interpreted the process of social reform as well as the roles of social reformer and his audience in the context of an alleged natural human desire for social change and improvement. Similarly, progressive change, the goal of social reform, then, contradicted the historical record as well as human nature. This inherent craving for progressive social change revealed a deep human belief in progress and happiness as highly desirable and inextricably linked.¹⁰⁰ Douglass was persistent through his *Life and Times*, about always looking to see the better side of humanity and to constantly pursue the principles of personal and social transformation. Douglass's post-reconstruction political judgment was self-confident and intellectually self-reliant. His firsthand knowledge of slavery grounded his understanding of freedom's requirements: robust state protection of life and liberty as well as the socially guaranteed opportunity for education and property accumulation, secured through equal citizenship.¹⁰¹

In sum, the attempt to consider Douglass as a Black social epistemologist in this chapter aims to offer a fresh perspective on Black intellectual contributions to the historiography of ideas. An exploration of the works and writings of Douglass has revealed that he elaborately

pursued an epistemological project that was aimed at both individual and social transformation for Black folks in different existential conditions (in-slavery and post-slavery). His commitments extend to the exploration of the social dimensions of knowledge among Black folks or in the Black community of knowers, to unravel the social aspects of knowledge transfer within this setting and the different obstacles to the knowledge that needed to be ruptured for the Black “unknowing” subject to acquire such a status within a society that characterizes them as something other than human. This is why the concept of “self-knowledge” is very significant in the philosophy of Frederick Douglass. It foregrounded the dynamics of rescuing “the self” for the Black slave from institutional systems of oppression that refuses to see Black slaves as worthy epistemic subjects. It also initiates a reconfiguration of the hegemonic characterization of the “subject” to be appropriated to the Black slave, who then becomes a self-affirming being through mere intuition rather than through socially agreed categories. Douglass created a new epistemic discourse that opens up a window for the conceptualization of the Black epistemic subject, not as an apparition or an abstract entity but as a materially grounded subject navigating the world through various intellectual schemes. The construction of Black slave as the knowing self (self-ownership) became one of the upshots of Douglass’s epistemic project, and it was upon this project that the demands for freedom from material conditions of slavery were made. In other words, self-knowledge is very crucial in the larger philosophical project of Douglass because it constituted the very basis upon which he imagined freedom for Black folks in a society that never intended for Blacks to be free from the chains of slavery.

It also became apparent that the contemporary ways in which the social dimensions of knowledge are talked about in contemporary epistemology were anticipated by Douglass. In contemporary discourse in social epistemology, social knowledge is often characterized by a

complementary view that encompasses individual epistemic dispositions that are shared within specific epistemic communities. Douglass's reflections on the inter-relatedness between Black self-knowledge and the development of a healthy community of Black knowers in the social context of slavery explored this notion of complementarity of social epistemological categories. Douglass emphasized the importance of knowledge and literacy to both individual and social transformation in his philosophy of education and philosophy of social reform, especially for a community of knowers whose epistemic agency was adamantly denied through institutional frameworks of power. This is exemplified by the relentless struggles to negotiate institutional frameworks of power, by self-consciously framing a new sense of identity as a being whose self-avowal of knowledge is only constrained by the extent to which he puts his imagination to work and the extent to which he was willing to resist the obstacles to knowledge for himself and other Black subjects. Through the reflections of Fredrick Douglass in many of his writings and biographies, we see a sustained effort to conceive of members of the Black community as "humans" using ethnological and epistemological arguments to counter the hegemonic narratives that put them outside of these categories of recognition. In other words, through the reflections of Douglass as articulated in this chapter, we see the development of a unique idea of Black epistemology that primarily conceives of the Black subject as a knower—a liberated epistemic agent that navigate the world through the strength of their knowledge—herein lies the significance of considering Frederick Douglass as a social epistemologist within antebellum America.

References

1. Fredrick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass Written by Himself: His Early Life as a Slave, His Escape from Bondage and his Complete History to the Present Time* (Boston: Park Publishing Co., 1881).

2. Ivy G. Wilson, "On Native Ground: Transnationalism, Frederick Douglass, and 'The Heroic Slave,'" *PMLA* 121, no. 2 (March 2006): 454.

3. Fredrick Douglass would later criticize the American school of ethnology on this point for attempting to deny the Black body of any ontological and transcendental meaning. However, In Douglass's reading of the American School of Ethnology, the black body c.1855 has not been emptied of transcendental meanings; rather, it is supercharged with them. In other words, the monogenist account of human origins that had served the abolitionist cause so well, Douglass recognizes, is propped up only by the weakening fiat of a literalist biblical history, and science, in his estimation, has not yet delved systematically enough either to affirm or deny the monogenist account—which makes Douglass's critique of the American School of Ethnology simultaneously more confident and more anxious. Douglass thus seems to understand the context that his text addresses as something of a vacuum of epistemic authority in which objective truth cannot find a place to hang its hat, which creates a certain rhetorical situation, indeed, a situation in which the rhetoricity of all knowledge-claims is somewhat uncomfortably exposed. Also, in "The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered," Douglass ridicules the logic of American ethnologists ("the scholars of America") as lacking in common sense. He arrived at this conclusion through the following line of reasoning; "man is distinguished from all other animals, by the possession of certain definite faculties and powers, as well as by physical organization and proportions. He is the only two-handed animal on the earth—the only one that laughs, and nearly the only one that weeps. Men instinctively distinguish between men and brutes. Common sense itself is scarcely needed to detect the absence of manhood in a monkey, or to recognize its presence in a Negro." This implies that even though the colonial system of oppression and dehumanization, in this this period, thrived on a mischaracterization of the Black subject and Douglass was adamant in his attempt to challenge such ethnological assumptions. He goes further to argue in "The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered," that having being "tried by all the usual, and all the unusual tests, whether mental, moral, physical, or psychological, the Negro is a Man—considering him as possessing knowledge, or needing knowledge, his elevation or his degradation, his virtues, or his vices—whichever road you take, you reach the same conclusion, the Negro is a Man." See. Fredrick Douglass, "The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered," in *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Philip S. Foner (Chicago, IL: Lawrence-Hill Books, 1999), 284. See also. Jared Hickman, "Douglass Unbound," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 68, no. 3 (December 2013): 327-333.

4. Fredrick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass, an American Slave*, First published by The Anti-Slavery Office, Boston, 1845 (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 48.

5. Frederick Douglass, "An Address to the Colored People of the United States, in *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Philip S. Foner (Chicago, IL: Lawrence-Hill Books, 1999), 119.

6. Frederick Douglass would later go on to claim that America has no choice but to accept and welcome the genius of Black folks as well as their scholarship projected into the world through their new-found/re-acquired self-reflectivity. As Douglass logically affirms, "[i]f the

American people could endure the negro's presence while a slave, they certainly can and ought to endure his presence as a free-man. If they could tolerate him when he was a heathen, they might bear with him when he is Christian, a gentleman and a scholar." See. Frederick Douglass, "Lessons of the Hour: An Address Delivered in Washington on D.C. on, 9 January, 1894." in *The Fredrick Douglass Papers: Series One; Speeches, Debates, and Interviews, Volume 5, 1881-95*, eds. John W. Blassingame and John R. McKivigan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 599.

7. L. Diane Barnes, ed. *Frederick Douglass: A Life in Documents* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013), xvii.

8. David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 1-2.

9. Frederic M. Holland, *Frederick Douglass: The Colored Orator* (Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1891), 397.

10. Graham Hodges, *Frederick Douglass: Crusading Orator for Human Rights* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 3.

11. Nicholas Buccola, *The Political Thought of Frederick Douglass: In the Pursuit of American Liberty* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 11.

12. Robert K. Sutton, "Introduction," *Majestic In His Wrath: A Pictorial Life of Frederick Douglass*, Published for the National Portrait Gallery and the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995).

13. Eric Sundquist, "Introduction," in *Fredrick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. Eric Sundquist (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1.

14. Broadus N. Butler, "Frederick Douglass: The Black Philosopher in the United States: A Commentary," in *Philosophy Born of Struggle: An Anthology of Afro-American Philosophy from 1917*, ed., Leonard Harris (Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing, 1983), 5-6.

15. See. Buckner H. P. Ariel, *The Negro: What is His Ethnological Status?* (Cincinnati: Published for the Proprietor, 1867); Samuel George Morton, *Types of Mankind or Ethnological Researches, Based Upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races, and Upon their Natural, Geographical, Philological, and Biblical History*, 7th Ed. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1855); and Samuel George Morton (Philadelphia: John Penington, 1844).

16. In this period, Blackness was not only regarded as moral and intellectual inferiority but also as a disease. So called 'medical evidence' was used to argue that Blackness could sometimes be cured, to save the Black race from extinction. Similar strategies were developed to prove that the deterioration of offspring in the Black race was manifested in higher rates of insanity, immorality, and criminality. Such views flourished in the 20th century. Injection of Blacks with syphilis was condoned because they were considered so immoral that they would be certain to catch it anyway. Scholars such as Arthur Jensen of the UC Berkeley was a major proponent in the late 20th century of the belief that Africans/Blacks lacked the capacity for western civilization, which required rational, analytic thought. See. J. Pandian and S. Parman, *The Making of Anthropology: The Semiotics of Self and Other in the Western Tradition* (New Delhi: Vedam Books, 2004), 169-171.

17. Frederick Douglass, "The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered," in *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Philip S. Foner (Chicago, IL: Lawrence-Hill Books, 1999), 284.

18. Douglass locates his earlier intimations of freedom in his acquisition of reading skills and in the act of reading itself, in particular in his reading of a volume entitled *The Columbian Orator*. Compiled by Caleb Bingham and published in 1797, the *Columbian Orator* contained a variety of pieces designed to instruct in the ornamental and useful art of eloquence. See. Shelley F. Fisher and Carla L. Peterson, "We Hold these Truths to be Self-Evident: The Rhetoric of Frederick Douglass's Journalism," in *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. Eric Sundquist (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.190.

19. Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 1st ed., Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1885., (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2005), 125.

20. David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 45.

21. Frederick Douglass, "Letter to Thomas Auld," *The Liberator*, September 22, 1848, in *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Philip S. Foner (Chicago, IL: Lawrence-Hill Books, 1999), 115.

22. Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 42. Also, see. Frederick Douglass, "The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered."

23. Stephan Palmié, "Introduction," in *Slave Cultures and the Culture of Slave*, ed. Stephan Palmié (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), X.

24. It is well documented that the contrivances, contradictions, brutalities and atrocities of the slave system combined and produced circumstances and conditions of living for Black people in America that can best be described as a veritable hell. Also, the accompanying prejudices and attitudes which were expressed toward non-slave black people were equally as vicious and caused them misery closely akin to that endured by the slaves. As Black people began to acquire recognition as formal communities in some places within the American scheme, there were corresponding expressions of resistance from an impressive number of black spokesmen. Of these, black history and other fields of black social concerns concur that Frederick Douglass was one of the most courageous, dynamic, prolific, and articulate. See. William H. Mc Clendon, "The Black Perspective of Frederick Douglass," *The Black Scholar* 3, no. 7/8 (March-April 1972): 7.

25. David B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Alfred & Knopf, 2014), 31.

26. Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey, *The Mark of Oppression: Explorations in the Personality of the American Negro* (Connecticut: Martino Publishing, 2014), 379.

27. *Ibid.*, 382.

28. See. Nolan Lewis and Louis Hubbard, "Manic-Depressive Reactions in Negroes," Vol. XI of *Research Publications of the Association for Research in Nervous and Mental Disease, Manic-Depressive Psychosis*, Baltimore, 1931 and J. W. Babcock, "The Colored Insane," *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction*, 1895" (Boston, 1895), 164-86.

29. *Ibid.*, 344.

30. In "Labeling and Treating Black Mental Illness in Alabama, 1861-1910," John S. Hughes, using information gathered from the Annual Report of the Officers of the Alabama

Insane Hospital, at Tuscaloosa for the Year 1870 (Montgomery, 1870), reported that conclusions that are drawn in medical research concerning insanity, psychosis and other mental disorders were essentially racist. In his findings, Hughes concluded that white medical practitioners viewed the boundary between mental and physical illness as permeable and indistinct. They considered mental illness to be a physical ailment rooted in physiological dysfunction or in anatomical (or structural) disorder of the brain or nervous system. In addition to this tendency to view madness as physical, medical authorities argued that the healthy African American possessed a blunted sensibility that resulted from a less highly developed nervous system than that found in Americans of European descent. See. John S. Hughes, "Labeling and Treating Black Mental Illness in Alabama, 1861-1910," *The Journal of Southern History* 58, no. 3 (Aug. 1992): 435-460.

31. Edward J. Blum, "Review: A Frederick Douglass for the World," *The Journal of African American History* 100, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 297.

32. This notion of "epistemology of ignorance is substantively different from how Charles W. Mills uses the term in his essay on "White Ignorance." In this essay, Mills utilized this concept to refer to the articulation of cognitive norms from an individualistic-epistemological standpoint such that the dynamic of what is considered as a particularly pervasive form of ignorance, what could be called white ignorance, could be linked to white supremacy. As he puts it, "the phrase "white ignorance" implies the possibility of a contrasting "knowledge," a contrast that would be lost if all claims to truth were equally spurious, or just a matter of competing discourses." Thus, in the way Mill conceives of this concept, the distinction between the domain of knowledge and ignorance will consist in the bifurcation between what is known as such and what is not. However, my usage of the term does merely refer to what is known or unknown as such; rather, it refers to the false categories of knowledge and being/un-being that is forcefully systematized as a form of social epistemology/power to undermine the condition and lives of Black folks, especially in antebellum America. Whereas Mills argues that "mapping an epistemology of ignorance is for [him] a preliminary to reformulating an epistemology that will give us genuine knowledge, I argue that the mapping of such an epistemology of ignorance clearly depicts the weaponization of ignorance—a violently imposed system of unknowing on Black slaves (within the context of 19th century America) in order to make them subservient in all existential considerations. Thus, the "success" of the American slave system was largely dependent on keeping Black slaves ignorant through extremely forceful and legal means (especially antiliteracy laws codified in the slave codes). In *Self Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*, Heather A. Williams, points out that placing antiliteracy laws in dialogue with the words of enslaved people enables an examination of the tensions that slave literacy provoked between owned and owner. Masters made every attempt to control their captives' thoughts and imaginations, indeed their hearts and minds. Maintaining a system of bondage in the Age of Enlightenment depended upon the master's being able to speak for the slave, to deny his or her humanity, and to draw a line between slave consciousness and human will. The presence of literate slaves threatened to give lie to the entire system. Reading indicated to the world that this so-called property had a mind, and writing foretold the ability to construct an alternative narrative about bondage itself. Literacy among slaves would expose slavery, and masters knew it. This was why the white slave owners implemented severe forms of punishment including death to any Black slave who dared to transgress the boundaries of unknowledge or the

domain of ignorance which are regarded as part of the natural state for the slave. Yet, Mills argues in “White Ignorance” that “white ignorance need not always be based on bad faith” because “You can have white racism, in particular white cognizers, in the sense of the existence of prejudicial beliefs about people of color without (at the same time and place) white domination of those people of color having been established; and you can also have white domination of people of color at a particular time and place without all white cognizers at that time and place being racist.” Mills believes that what he refers to as “racialized causality” can give rise to two dimensions of white ignorance—first, for a straightforward racist cognizer, and second for a non-racist cognizer who may indirectly form mistaken beliefs (e.g., that after the abolition of slavery in the United States, blacks generally had opportunities equal to whites) because of the social suppression of pertinent knowledge, though without prejudice himself. This view does not correspond with the ethnological assumptions and hypothesis customarily held by white America in 19th century about Blacks, specifically Black slaves, as biologically inferior and underserving of equal opportunities with whites. The ethnological assumptions about Blacks during this period, does not allow for this individualistic-communalistic bifurcation that Mills points to in his discussion of racialized causality in relation to the prevalence of white racism and epistemology of ignorance (especially detailing the racist on non-racist epistemic ascriptions of what he regards as “white ignorance”). Also, Mills seems to equate white disillusionment with white ignorance, albeit he thinks of this as a case of epistemic failure or flaw rather than as evidence of white power/privilege at work. However, on my usage of the term “epistemology of ignorance,” this idea of “mistaken belief” that Mills wants to classify as an example or evidence of epistemic failure or cognitive deficiency, means something entirely different. It would reinforce white power to remake reality (calling things that be not, as though they were), including relegating (true the sheer power of white imagination) Black beings to an unnatural state of slavery (and its enforced domain of ignorance) while falsely (or “mistakenly”) describing it as the natural state, the natural condition of all Blacks. It is also important to note that the view of race/racism as a fungible trait of whiteness that Mills promotes in “White Ignorance,” is quite different from those he held in an earlier essay “Revisionist Ontologies: Theorizing White Supremacy.” In *Revisionist Ontologies: Theorizing White Supremacy*, Mills considers race/racism as a product of an enclosed political system which should be treated as a particular mode of domination, with its special norms for allocating benefits and burdens, rights and duties, its own ideology, and an internal logic at least semi-autonomous, influencing law, culture, and consciousness. On this account, whiteness or the violence of white racism cannot be excused as a form of mistakenly held systems of beliefs or practices that brutally dehumanizes an entire otherized race—the Black race. Especially when it is noted that the enforcement of the slave codes and American legal codes upholding and defending the institution of slavery was contingent on the idea/belief that the “state of ignorance” was natural state/condition of the Black slave. However, despite laws and custom in American slave states prohibiting enslaved Black people from learning to read and write, a small percentage managed, through ingenuity and will, to acquire a degree of literacy in the antebellum period. Noteworthy here is the fact that access to the written word, whether scriptural or political, revealed a world beyond bondage in which African Americans could imagine themselves free to think and behave as they chose. Literacy provided the means to write a pass to freedom (as in the case of Frederick Douglass), to learn of abolitionist activities, or read the Bible. Because it most often happened in secret, the very act of

learning to read and write subverted the master-slave relationship and created a private life for those who were owned by others. Once literate, many used this hard-won skill to disturb the power relations between master and slave, as they fused their desire for literacy with their desire for freedom. In “‘We Slipped and Learned to Read:’ Slave Accounts of the Literacy Process, 1830-1865,” Janet Cornelius argues that the fact that Black slaves were able to achieve literacy even in a context where “ignorance” was weaponized against them represents the hallmark of Black genius and evidence of the capacity to reclaim their Black agency and personhood, that are totally denied under American slavery institution. See. Charles W. Mill, “White Ignorance,” in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, eds. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 13-38; Charles W. Mill, “Revisionist Ontologies: Theorizing White Supremacy,” *Social and Economic Studies* 43, no. 3 (September 1994):108; Heather A. Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Janet Cornelius, “‘We Slipped and Learned to Read:’ Slave Accounts of the Literacy Process, 1830-1865,” *Phylon* 44, no. 3 (1983): 171-186.

33. William Goodell, *The American Slave Code* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 251.

34. *Ibid.*, 252.

35. *Ibid.*, 251.

36. William H. Mc Clendon, “The Black Perspective of Frederick Douglass,” 8.

37. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass*, 92.

38. *Ibid.*, 80.

39. Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 305.

40. *Ibid.*, 73.

41. *Ibid.*, 117.

42. *Ibid.*

43. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative*, 42.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Angela Davis, *Lectures on Liberation* (Los Angelis, CA: National United Committee to Free Angela Davis, 1971), 1.

46. Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 118.

47. *Ibid.*

48. David W. Blight, *Fredrick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 40.

49. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative*, 73.

50. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 152.

51. Hartman describes Douglass’s battle with Covey as “dutiful labor” for developing a growing manhood. She argues that if the emphasis on individual responsibility, reliance, and self-making inevitably attributed the wretched condition of Blacks of their shortcomings, the remedy invariably suggested was showing thyself a man and the favored demonstration of this nascent manhood was dutiful labor. This description of the battle with Covey is not consistent with how Douglass himself described it—as the battle for his life. See. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 152.

52. Nancy Koehn, *Forged in Crisis: The Power of Courageous Leadership in Turbulent Times* (New York: Scribner, 2017), 224.

53. It is important to note that Douglass usage of the term “man” in talking about the “self-made man” is not intended to be sexist. He was using the term in a generic sense to conform with nineteenth century etiquette of writing, where the term “man” was often used for the designation of the human species. See. Harrison Allen, *A System of Human Anatomy* (Philadelphia: Henry C. Lea’s Son & Co., 1884); Arthur De Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1915; W.H. Fowler, “Lectures on Anthropology,” *Nature* 50, no. 1294 (August 16, 1894): 387-396.

54. Frederick Douglass, “Self-Made Men,” An Address Delivered in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, March 1893, in George Barr, et.al., *The Speeches of Frederick Douglass: A Critical Edition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 420.

55. Waldo E. Martin, “Images of Fredrick Douglass in the Afro-American Mind: The Recent Black Freedom Struggle,” in *Fredrick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. Eric Sundquist (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 275.

56. *Ibid.*, 275.

57. Fredrick Douglass, *Narrative*, 42.

58. Frederick Douglass, “Self-Made Men,” 420-421.

59. Waldo E. Martin, Jr. *The Mind of Frederick Douglass* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), x-xi.

60. Fredrick Douglass, “Address at the Great Anti-Colonization Meeting in New York,” in *Fredrick Douglass: The Heroic Slave, A Cultural and Critical Edition*, eds. Robert S. Levine, John Stauffer and John R. McKivigan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 124.

61. William H. Mc Clendon, “The Black Perspective of Frederick Douglass,” 8.

62. Fredrick Douglass, *Narrative*, 34.

63. *Ibid.*

64. Fredrick Douglass, “The Heroic Slave,” in *Narrative*, 151.

65. *Ibid.*

66. Ivy G. Wilson, “On Native Ground: Transnationalism, Frederick Douglass, and ‘The Heroic Slave,’” *PMLA* 121, no. 2 (March 2006): 458.

67. See for example: Annalisa Coliva, *The Varieties of Self-Knowledge* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Brie Gertler, eds., *Privileged Access: Philosophical Accounts of Self-Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Peter Carruthers, *The Opacity of the Mind: An Integrative Theory of Self-Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Annalisa Coliva, *The Self & Self Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

68. Frederick Douglass, “Letter to Thomas Auld,” 113.

69. *Ibid.*

70. Heather A. Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 7.

71. *Ibid.*, 25.

72. Fredrick Douglass, *Narrative*, 77.

73. Douglass provided examples for his systematic critique of the complicity of Christianity or so-called Christians in the brutal structure of American slavery. He describes his unpalatable experiences he had while living in a Christian community in 1834, this was a period when he went to live with an overseer named, Mr. William Freeland after he left Mr. Covey. Douglass reports that near Mr. Freeland lived the Reverend Daniel Weedon, and in the same neighborhood

lived the Rev. Rigby Hopkins. These were members and ministers in the Reformed Methodist Church. Mr. Weeden owned, among others, a woman slave, whose name I have forgotten. This woman's back, for weeks, was kept literally raw, made so by the lash of this merciless, *religious* wretch. He used to hire hands. His maxim was, behave well or behave ill, it is the duty of a master occasionally to whip a slave, to remind him of his master's authority. Such was his theory, and such his practice. Mr. Hopkins was even worse than Mr. Weeden. His chief boast was his ability to manage slaves. The peculiar feature of his government was that of whipping slaves in advance of deserving it. Such is the ferocity with which Douglass describes those who are supposed to be "exemplary" Christians within the system of American slavery. See. Fredrick Douglass, *Narrative*, 77.

74. Ibid.

75. Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 123.

76. Ibid.

77. Jack Turner, "Douglass and Political Judgment: The Post-Reconstruction Years," in *A Political Companion to Fredrick Douglass*, ed. Neil Roberts (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2018),

78. Ibid.

79. Angela Davis, *Lectures on Liberation*, 3.

80. David W. Blight, *Fredrick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*, 46.

81. Fredrick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass*, 79.

82. Ibid., 79-80.

83. According to Daniel J. Royer, much of what is revealed in these narratives is the way in which literacy enabled and empowered blacks to gain freedom from, and control over, the ruling culture that enslaved them. The narratives also, however, reveal the ways in which literacy, as a tool of white hegemony, sought to exclude and dominate illiterate blacks. See. Daniel J. Royer, "The Process of Literacy as Communal Involvement in the Narratives of Frederick Douglass," *African American Review* 28, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): 363

84. James Matlack, "The Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass," *Phylon* 40, no. 1 (1st Qtr., 1979): 21.

85. Ibid., 22.

86. John Ernest, *Resistance and Reformation in Nineteenth-Century African-American Literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 153.

87. Waldo E. Martin, Jr. *The Mind of Frederick Douglass*, 192.

88. Frederick Douglass, "It Moves," or the Philosophy of Reform," An Address Delivered in Washington, D.C., 20 November 1883, in George Barr, et.al., *The Speeches of Frederick Douglass: A Critical Edition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 379.

89. Fredrick Douglass, "Our Destiny is Largely in our own Hands: An Address Delivered in Washington, D.C., on 16 April 1883," in *The Fredrick Douglass Papers: Series One; Speeches, Debates, and Interviews, Volume 5, 1881-95*, eds. John W. Blassingame and John R. McKivigan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 61.

90. Waldo E. Martin, Jr. *The Mind of Frederick Douglass*, 175.

91. Frederick Douglass, "Let the Negro Alone," An Address Delivered in New York, New York, 11 May 1869, in George Barr, et.al., *The Speeches of Frederick Douglass: A Critical Edition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 251.

92. Fredrick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Fredrick Douglass* (New York: Citadel Press, 1983), 458. Originally published in 1882 by Christian Age.
93. *Ibid.*, 407-408.
94. *Ibid.*, 253.
95. Waldo E. Martin, Jr. *The Mind of Frederick Douglass*, 55.
96. *Ibid.*, 165.
97. Frederick Douglass, "The Union and How to Save It," *Douglass Monthly*, February 1861, in *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Philip S. Foner (Chicago, IL: Lawrence-Hill Books, 1999), 431.
98. Waldo E. Martin, Jr. *The Mind of Frederick Douglass*, 170.
99. *Ibid.*
100. *Ibid.*, 171.
101. Jack Turner, "Douglass and Political Judgment," 223.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE SPIRIT OF BIKO: BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AS ANTICOLONIAL EPISTEMOLOGY

We are going to emancipate ourselves from mental slavery, for though others may free the body, none but ourselves can free the mind.

~Marcus Garvey, 1937.

What we are striving for is to liberate the black man [person] from the arsenal of complexes that germinated in a colonial situation.

~Fanon, 1952

As [Biko] grappled with the question of how to achieve freedom, he showed one of his greatest qualities—an ability to confront reality, to grow and develop ideas and continually broaden his outlook.

~Nelson Mandela, *A tribute to Stephen Bantu Biko*, 2012

This chapter focuses on the formation of Black epistemologies in the African diaspora in the later parts of the twentieth century. It specifically examines the philosophy of Black Consciousness, as espoused by Steve Bantu Biko, the famous anti-apartheid revolutionary thinker, community organizer, philosopher, and inspirational leader whose political relevance transcends the South African geospatial polity. The particular engagement with the philosophy of Black Consciousness, as pursued in this chapter, aims to unravel the subtleties of the epistemological constructs that inform the formation of this ideology or political movement and the way of life that this philosophical system predicated upon. It is a survey of the principles of the psychological and the social principles of knowledge that are contained in Biko's notion of Black Consciousness and how such principles were employed to confront the repressive

existential conditions witnessed by Black subjects in the context of extreme anti-black oppression. Thus, the thrust of Biko's anticolonial epistemology was mainly directed at confronting the belief systems, political ethos, and knowledge categories of white colonial hegemony that constructed Black subjects as inferior in the domain of knowledge and as 'outsiders' even within their own territorial and epistemic space.

It was aimed at evolving a system of knowledge that primarily considers Black people as subjects but not merely as objects of knowledge. In one of his autobiographical reflections titled "We Black," Biko describes a sense of Black agency that makes this anti-colonial epistemological move possible. It rests on the fact that the Black subject is forced to engage in a dialectical assessment of the present conditions of life imposed upon it by external hegemonic systems of power and this process, can unravel and reject its condition of epistemic dislocation. As he poignantly articulates, "my thinking and every other facet of my life has been carved and shaped within the context of separate development."¹ This kind of awareness is necessary for the Black subject to be able to confront and transcend the systems of white colonial hegemony. As Biko articulates further, "in stages during my life I have managed to outgrow some of the things the system taught me."² This realization is what enables him, as well as the liberated Black subjects within this context, to grasp this change in belief systems and categories that is at the center of Biko's notion of Black Consciousness. Biko succinctly makes this case when he avows that "what I propose to do now is to take a look at those who participate in opposition to the system—not from a detached point of view but from the point of view of a [B]lack man, conscious of the urgent need for an understanding of what is involved in the new approach—"Black Consciousness."³

The anticolonial epistemology that undergirds Biko's notion of Black Consciousness sees knowledge as a product of an existential contradiction in a colonial context—on the one hand, it is used to construct the basis of *being-in-the-world*, while—on the other hand, it is used to invent evidence of those who are *-in-the-world* but are *not-of-the world*. That is, within the material world that is constructed through a colonial-hegemonic vision, two forms of consciousness are in existence, even though one is unacknowledged. One form of consciousness is constructed as the *Being-for-itself* while the other form of consciousness is de-constructed as the *Being-not-for-itself*, within this epistemological praxis. The *Being-not-for-itself* is the Black subject who is not expected to deviate from the systems of thought generated, espoused, and propagated by the colonialists who retain the realm of the *Being-for-itself*. This is the framework of bifurcated systems of human consciousness that is unraveled in Biko's Black Consciousness, which fundamentally challenges the attribution of lack of self-consciousness to Black subjects under South Africa's colonial, apartheid regime. In this regard, one must take into consideration, Biko's emphasis on the idea of "spiritual poverty" that signifies an inferiority complex in Blacks which constrains them to think of themselves as the *other* rather than the *self*. It is this psychological paralysis foisted on Blacks that perpetually tries to convince them of their assumed epistemic inabilities and unworthiness. It is what makes it difficult for Blacks to develop any meaningful sense of *being-in the world*, expressing forms of agential control over the conceptualization of reality and control over their socio-political realities.

Thus, Biko's attempt to tackle the problem of lack of self-consciousness for Blacks within apartheid South Africa takes on an epistemological character. This consists of his insistence that Black subjects need to avow themselves as "knowledgeable beings" in the face of virulent racist characterizations of Blacks non-entities. This is what informed his view that Blacks needed to

reclaim their agency as a phenomenon that is functional and separate from the fixated ascriptions apportioned to it within the [il]logic of white colonial domination. Since Biko was already well aware of the fact that “the [il]logic] behind white domination is to prepare the [B]lack man for the subservient role in [his] country.”⁴ It is this [il]logic of domination that has reduced the Black subject, in Biko’s words, to an “obliging shell” that looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he/she regards as the “inevitable position,” completely defeated, drowning in misery while bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity.⁵ Biko was adamant that the process of changing this subversive position that most Black people find themselves in has to start with changing the Black mindset to perceive reality differently. This was aimed at achieving freedom for the mass of the South African Black population that has been held bound under the shadows of colonial hegemony.

It was a move that requires a radical break from the status quo. This is why Mabogo Percy argues in *Biko: Philosophy, Identity, and Liberation* that Biko’s philosophy of Black Consciousness is a rebellious one because it “exemplified in itself a philosophy of transcendence, a going beyond *what-is* and a becoming of *what-ought-to-be*. The ‘ought’ in this case is not simply an ethical imperative but, more importantly, an [epistemic] notion of change.”⁶ The epistemic notion of change being referred to in this instance, involves the development of a mechanism or philosophical apparatus to change the belief systems or thought patterns of individuals—in this case, Black subjects—which makes them forcibly reject their subservient position, under the context of colonial power and domination, as a counterfactual reality. The epistemological framework that Biko advocates “must be considered as the expressive means through which [Black] men and women make their history as conscious agents.”⁷ This process of conscious transmogrification of belief system is consolidated by an extension of agency through

psychological and physical gestures of ‘heroic black antiracism,’ especially in a context where the weight of colonial domination and oppression are not merely psychological but also brutally empirical. But for Biko, it was important that the epistemic change has to begin with the transformation of the psychological dispositions of Blacks—a change in the mindset of Blacks to confront the illogic of white domination, as well as generating the grounds for the formation of new epistemic beliefs about the nature of the world. This implies that the notion of epistemic change that is embedded in Biko’s philosophy of Black Consciousness functions as both evaluative and transformative. It evaluates the conceptualizations or perceptions of the self that is held by people within the oppressed Black communities in apartheid South Africa, and aims to transform such perceptions of the self to affect material or social reality.

The epistemic notion of change, as it pertains to Biko’s philosophy of Black Consciousness was focused on peeling off the layers of colonial mentality under which most Black youths are entrapped and at the same time, restoring dignity and self-worth to Black people within a context of dehumanization, oppression and systematic silencing that made it difficult for group associations. In other words, Biko understood that part of the scheme of the colonial edifice constructed within occupied territories or “colonies” is the eradication of social circles of knowledge to sequester any attempt for social mobilization against the imposed structures of power. This is why the colonial apparatus, including the organized system of education would go as far as making colonial subjects internalize their oppression as the norm of existence. That is, they make otherwise intellectually sound human beings come to form and accept beliefs about their inferiority. This was the fundamental cunning of the white colonial settlers in South Africa (and generally in Africa, since the partitioning of Africa for European colonial exploitation in the Berlin Conference of 1884); the propagation of deceitful claims about

the intellectual, spiritual and moral inferiority of Black Africans or subjects while at the same time exploiting and stealing their human and material resources for their criminal gain.⁸ Thus, Biko shows that the colonial archeology of thinking and the ordering of knowledge is deeply flawed, and a new epistemological scheme had to be developed to rupture the system of colonial hegemony and liberate Black subjects from such systems of oppression. Steve Biko, arguably, did more than any other political leader to form a political movement whose primary aim and achievement was to challenge the intellectual foundations of European modernity while engaging with that modernity itself through the weapons it had itself furnished.⁹

In *Black Consciousness in South Africa: The Dialectics of Ideological Resistance to White Supremacy*, Robert Fatton argues, looking specifically at the case of South Africa, that the philosophy of Black Consciousness was inspired by the need to combat white supremacy which was the primary ideology of the apartheid system of institutionalized and racialized segregation that was imposed by minority white settlers on a Black nation-state from 1948 until the early 1990s. Over time, this racism or racist practices generated white psychology that imposed a system of moral and cultural inferiority to the Black population which largely informed the development of pernicious systems of social, political, and economic anti-black exploitation. It is precise because this form of racism was such an active ideological force encroaching on the material base of the society, that South African political philosophers such as Biko developed a counter-discourse.¹⁰ In other words, Fatton considers Black Consciousness, as a philosophical system that was developed to forge an epistemological resistance against racism. Fatton argues further that examining Black Consciousness as an ideology capable of challenging the cultural hegemony of the white supremacist regime in South Africa, entails understanding the Movement as an ethical-political weapon of an oppressed class struggling to reaffirm its humanity through

active participation in the demise of a racist and exploitative system.¹¹ In this scenario, *to be alive* is not merely to perform the biological functions of a living thing, rather it is to be aware (*to possess active knowledge*) of the deeper dialectical formations that operate within the present material sphere which perpetually challenges the grounds for which one claims *to be alive*, as a human. Thus, a reading of Biko's philosophy of Black Consciousness as an anticolonial epistemology, as pursued in this chapter, reveals the existential and moral dimensions of this system of knowledge that reifies the context of human agency and the place of social agency in achieving epistemic freedom.

It is important to acknowledge the overarching political context in which Biko developed and propagated his idea and ideal of Black Consciousness; here, Biko's reflections in *I Write What I Like* is pertinent:

Born shortly before 1948 [the year in which the Nationalist Party came to power], I have lived all my conscious life in the framework of institutionalized separate development. My friendships, my love, my education, my thinking, and every other facet of my life have been carved and shaped within the context of separate development. In stages, during my life I have managed to outgrow some of the things the system taught me. Hopefully what I propose to do now is to take a look at those who participate in opposition to the system – not from a detached point of view but from the point of view of a black man, conscious of the urgent need for an understanding of what is involved in the new approach – '[B]lack Consciousness.'¹²

The references Biko makes here regarding the institutionalized separation was aimed at highlighting the context of the brutal apartheid regime in South Africa, driven by the white minority rule that established a system of colonial hegemony and a system of white domination which denied basic human rights to Black South Africans. This made Black South Africa (referred to as Azania by Black nationalists during this period) in the 1960s ripe for an ideology of liberation informed by a distinctive epistemological apparatus. Since the oppression of apartheid society took place overtly and blatantly, with all opposition silenced and

institutionalized racism triumphant, Blacks were portrayed as innately inferior, accustomed to dehumanized living, sexually promiscuous, intellectually limited, and prone to violence. Blackness symbolized evil, demise, uncleanness, in contrast to whiteness which equaled order, wealth, purity, goodness, cleanliness, and the epitome of beauty. Exclusionary practices over centuries led to what might be described as the ‘inferiorization of blacks,’ inevitably internalized by the victims themselves.¹³ That is, in this context of ‘inferiorization,’ Blacks could not come to think of themselves as worthy epistemic agents capable of claiming distinctive knowledge about their world and how they perceive reality. In other words, the colonial imposition of categories of negation upon Blacks in such hegemonic contexts undermines the very basic conditions of epistemic agency. This is why it is crucial to read Biko’s Black Consciousness as an anticolonial epistemology that embodies a form of Black resistance aimed at demolishing the structures of colonial hegemony, psychopathologies, including oppressive epistemologies that antagonizes Black people’s livability in an anti-black world.

What Biko reveals, in his diagnostic of the Black condition under white-colonial repression or oppression, has only one ultimate objective, which is to conquer the Black mind. This is why Biko affirms that “the greatest potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”¹⁴ The profound implication of this diagnostic is that, for black people to imagine freedom, they must free their minds (a metaphor for being and *becoming*, self-identity, and autonomy) from colonial domination and resist the hegemonic systems that categorize Black existence as a subaltern. The emphasis here is on the demonstration of an attitude of the mind that unleashes the autonomous self (Black self), as the primary apparatus for living in a world that is already anti-black in its ontological formations. Thus, Biko’s Black Consciousness, when considered as an anticolonial epistemological framework reverses the epistemic status of Black

subjects from ‘non-thinking things’ to ‘thinking subjects’ who are in control of their stream of consciousness and are aware of the contradictions that are socially imposed by external forces to deny them the reality of subjective experiences. Black Consciousness philosophy as imagined by Biko is focused on developing a notion of the Black conscious experience, untainted by the false categories imposed upon it by the dialectics of being which has gained currency under the western (foreign) imaginary. Biko argued that such imaginary constructions, a product of the western culture should be vehemently rejected. He argues thus:

In rejecting Western values, therefore, we are rejecting those things that are not only foreign to us but that seek to destroy the most cherished of our beliefs—that the corner-stone of society is man himself—not just his welfare, not his material wellbeing but just man himself with all his ramifications.¹⁵

In other words, the western imaginary which equates the natural category of being—“man,” with non-Blacks has to be rejected as phenomenological non-reality as well as epistemological foundationalism that is deeply flawed. Its deep flaw consists of its inability to capture the subjective experience, belief systems, and stream of consciousness of Black subjects as the phenomenological and intellectual production of “man himself.” The idea of “man-himself” that Biko alludes to rescues Black agency from the western dialectic of being that denies the Black subjective experience as the evidence non-thinking things. This speaks directly to the central issue that my dissertation focuses on—how Black subjects are reduced to passive objects of thought or unthinking agents within the epistemological considerations under western imaginary. What is of especial interest in this discourse, is Biko’s framing of Black Consciousness as both an existential act and a philosophical system that looks at the cognitive life of the Black subject as a phenomenological experience that signifies freedom—epistemic freedom.

Biko expands further on this idea of Black Consciousness as a mechanism designed to achieve epistemic freedom for the Black subject when he maintains that “Black Consciousness seeks to talk to the Black man in a language that is his own. It is only by recognizing the basic set-up in the [B]lack world that one will come to realize the urgent need for a re-awakening of the sleeping masses.”¹⁶ This action of re-awakening is a metaphor for epistemic freedom.

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This is evident in how Biko himself defines his philosophy of Black Consciousness:

Briefly defined, therefore, Black Consciousness is, in essence, the realization by the [B]lack man [Black folks generally] of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their operation – the [B]lackness of their skin – and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It seeks to demonstrate the lie that black is an aberration from the “normal” which is white. It is a manifestation of a new realization that by seeking to run away from themselves and to emulate the white man, [B]lacks are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them [B]lack. Black Consciousness, therefore, takes cognizance of the deliberateness of God’s plan in creating [B]lack people black. It seeks to infuse the [B]lack community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion, and their outlook on life.¹⁸

Here, Biko emphasizes the need to achieve freedom from the kind of mental slavery that white colonial values have imposed on Blacks, which invariably has generated a deep sense of alienation from the Black self as something liminal compared to that of the colonialists. The upshot of such self-alienation is self-hate which Biko addresses as a phenomenon that evolved as a logical consequence of the colonial invasion of Black existential territories. To combat against this problem of existence, he advocates a new but radical philosophical system of thought—

Black Consciousness—that aims to engage with this problem from its very ontological and epistemological foundations; by making sure that Black people living in this context, develop a healthy sense of self through an emphasis on group pride as well as building new epistemic categories that center African/Black culture as the core for *Being-in-the-world* with an emancipated self-consciousness. Biko goes further to assert that:

The interrelationship between the consciousness of the self and the emancipatory program is of paramount importance. Blacks no longer seek to reform the system because so doing implies acceptance of the major points around which the system revolves. Blacks are out to completely transform the system and to make of it what they wish. Such a major undertaking can only be realized in an atmosphere where people are convinced of the truth inherent in their stand. Liberation, therefore, is of paramount importance in the concept of Black Consciousness.¹⁹

It is apparent from this assertion that Biko is expressing a radical anticolonial sentiment—that calls for the submerging of the colonial system, its logic, and knowledge schemes because it does not cater to the Black experience. He argues that a reformist agenda should not be accommodated in any guise because it would amount to replicating the hegemonic system of a false sense of intellectual superiority that informs colonial practices in Africa and the so-called colonies. So, he insisted that the goal of evolving a new system of thinking (Black Consciousness) is to “completely transform the system” and reconstruct it into what Blacks want it to be. In other words, the Black experience should be the very basis upon which Black folks should construct the ideas and systems they live by and not through extraverted or alienating systems.

The emergence of the Black Consciousness philosophy in the late 1960s is one of the most important philosophical developments ever to take place in the evolution of African political thought in Azania. This philosophy surfaced at a time when above-ground black political activities were virtually nonexistent in Azania following the banning of the African

National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) by the white racist government in 1960. It was at this critical historical juncture that the alienation of Black youth from the dominant white society found concrete expression in the categorical rejection of white liberal leadership by the newly formed all-black South African Students Organization (SASO) which laid the foundation for and became the cradle of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) of Azania. The founders of SASO advocated the adoption of a radical political ideology which, in addition to its deep roots in orthodox African nationalism, borrowed major elements from the revolutionary writings of Black thinkers like Malcolm X, Frantz Fanon and pan-Africanists like Sékou Touré, Kenneth Kaunda, Kwame Nkrumah, and Thomas Sankara.²⁰ The philosophy of Black Consciousness as propounded and effectively articulated by Steve Biko, the Black militant who has come to be known as the father of Black Consciousness in Azania, drew breath from some of these anticolonial political views that were prominent during this period in the African diaspora.²¹ Although, the objectives of Black Consciousness were political from the start, in the interests of their survival, its propagators chose to mute its political thrust and publicly emphasized its more cultural and intellectual side.²² It is this intellectual side that is of principal interest in this work.

From Dehumanization to Humanization: The thrust of Biko's Epistemological Praxis

The concept of human knowledge, which ordinarily encompasses the product of the beliefs held by individuals as well as the ideas, thought patterns and products of the imagination that constitutes the content of perception and intuition, have not been historically represented as a phenomenon that pertains to all humans, especially in the wake of western-colonialist efforts to project the superiority of humans who identify as part of the white racial group over and above those who are identified as part of the outgroups. My work highlights how epistemic categories

developed within ‘mainstream’ schemas of knowledge have been systematically concretized to isolate Black agency in the discourse of knowledge. This is at the epicenter of Biko’s anti-colonial epistemological system. Biko’s anti-colonial epistemological praxis unravels a system of racialized epistemology that is developed within colonial settings, such as in Azania (South Africa), to dehumanize Black subjects by categorizing them as inferior to perfect their racialized exploitation. This is the central idea behind the status of racial superiority and social ascendancy that white racist settlers built for themselves throughout the colonial period. In countries or settings where they wielded undisputed and disputed control, white racist settlers constructed formidable environments of fear and terror for Blacks in order to maintain their privileged status within the systems. To be in a position to exploit subjugated people and to justify that exploitation, racists have to resort to the practice of demoting the colonial or colonized people to the level of inferior.²³ It was a system that sought to perfect the dehumanization of Black folks by making them believe the false epistemic categories about their inferiority.

The making of the colonial subject or the colonized, is often a brutal-dehumanizing process, especially when considered from an epistemological perspective. It has to entail the conscious manipulations of categories of thought and the domain of humanity to determine the types of people or *Beings* that would be valued as either worthy or unworthy epistemic agents. What Biko’s philosophical perspective shows is that the racialized epistemology undergirding colonial hegemonic practices in the African geospatial continuum should be understood as an active process of dehumanization that already began from the moment that colonial difference was imposed upon Black people living within this region, to achieve the erosion of the *self* and alienation. This erosion of the self is driven by the imposition of alien categories or western values on non-white people as the normative ways of viewing the world.

To understand Biko's intellectual legacy, one must [acknowledge] the people to whom he addressed his ideas and the effect of their political context, viz. a radically unjust society, on them. People living in radically unjust societies sometimes experience suffering, degradation, oppression, humiliation, exploitation, and so on, without necessarily conceptualizing this as being unjust. They thus accept their situation willingly and endure it passively, because they have internalized a set of ideas legitimating it.²⁴

It is when this state of internalization is completed that the alienation of the Black subject is signaled as complete. It is a kind of suffering, albeit a psychological one, that creeps up on the oppressed Black people that they started to accept their alienated conditions as the norm of existence. This is what Biko recognized as the collusion of the oppressed with the oppressor and expressed what he saw as the bitter truth: that of Black people 'bearing' the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity.²⁵

This process of alienation is often backed by the threat of physical harm and even death, as well as legalized instruments that are marshaled to maintain the hierarchies of difference and the standards of power that are employed to maintain the status quo. With a string of socially disruptive and political cum economically devastating colonial experiences, therefore, African identities in this context, as they were embedded in precolonial African ways of life, were either destroyed or relegated to the status of uncivilized and backward beliefs, sometimes superstitious practices, or unacceptable challenges to colonial programs and preferences.²⁶ In such a condition, epistemic violence becomes the primary mode of achieving compliance to the colonial ideals and the destructive impulses, because everyone has to think in monolithic ways and the display of any critical attitude towards the dominant ideas or practices are undesired. This is a world where the irrational is already inverted as the 'rational' and the 'rational,' takes on a new sense of importance as the emergent self-categorized 'rational' subject. This could only happen under a

colonial system because it is a system that derives its meaning from such illogical categorizations.

When Biko describes the capturing of the mind of Blacks of “the colonized” as the primary objective of colonization, he is describing the mind as the scene of subjection because when a person’s process of thinking is controlled, it makes it quite easy to condemn such an individual to subjugated realities. To liberate the Black mind from this system of colonial capturing, Biko developed a revolutionary theory of the Black mind that considers Black experience as the ultimate measure of reality. He was very much interested in dealing with the foundation of the problem of the colonial mindset that held Black people in bondage, from the cognitive or psychological level. From this standpoint, “Black Consciousness was defined primarily as an orientation toward the present. Black Consciousness, declared the SASO Manifesto adopted in July 1971, was an attitude of mind, a way of life in which the black man [person] saw himself as self-defined and not as defined by others.”²⁷ What this implies is that the Black Consciousness philosophy was about reclaiming the Black *self* through the eschewing of the colonial mindset of the *colonized self*.

Thus, Black Consciousness became a revolutionary theory. Its immediate task was to make possible this complete transformation of the white system and this liberation of black people. The problems involved in this restructuring of society as a whole were immensely complex, requiring much more than mere negation of the negatives created by institutionalized racism. Black Consciousness was the antithetical stage in the long and difficult process of dialectical liberation.²⁸

Thus, for Biko, Black Consciousness became a rallying point for the revolutionizing of the Black mind. What was in question was exactly the psychological battle for the minds of Black people, and in this regard, Biko considered the transformation of consciousness as a catalyst to stimulate Black people to mass action against colonial oppression, in its psychological and material forms, including a mechanism for achieving social change. As Biko argues;

It becomes more necessary to see the truth as it is if you realize that the only vehicle for change are these people who have lost their personality. The first step, therefore, is to make the black man come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth. This is what we mean by an inward-looking process. This is the definition of “Black Consciousness.”²⁹

Biko would work tirelessly until he drew his last breath, to devise intellectual and political schemes towards freeing Black people in South Africa from psychologically so that they can literarily take their destiny into their own hands.

Unlike in traditional epistemological discourse where the thrust of epistemological inquiry is focused on describing the phenomenon of human knowledge or who is knowledgeable in the deontic terms of who possess epistemic authority, contextualizing the appropriateness of truth-reliability and the senses of epistemic responsibility, Black Consciousness, as conceived by Biko, have at its core, the pursuit of epistemic freedom for Black people (epistemic agents). It is not merely a consideration of the abstract qualities or functions of the human mind in grasping reality, truth, and the perceptive elements derivable from the world, rather it is a philosophical system that aims to develop a unique cognitive disposition that Black subjects need to exhibit in conditions of extreme anti-Black oppression to achieve liberation. So, whereas, Black subjects in traditional epistemological discourse are undermined as “captive” or “negated” subjects, in Biko’s anticolonial epistemological formulation, Black subjects are liberated through the emphasis on the cognitive import of Black Consciousness. This cognitive aspect of Black Consciousness is what Ndlovu-Gatsheni in *Epistemic Freedom: Deprovincialization and Decolonization*, refers to as the process of epistemic freedom that brings about cognitive justice. In this regard, epistemic freedom for the Black subject, speaks to cognitive justice and the right to think for oneself. Epistemic freedom is fundamentally about the right to think, theorize,

interpret the world, develop own methodologies, and write from where one is located and unencumbered by Eurocentrism.³⁰ Within the conceptual scheme of Black Consciousness, epistemic freedom is conceived as the total freedom of colonized subjects to exhibit the fruits of their humanity unhindered or unencumbered by imposed values at the system of thinking and alien cultural archeology.³¹ Thus, the thrust of Biko's philosophical praxis is the construction of an epistemological system that frees the Black condition from colonial oppression.

Biko's philosophy of Black Consciousness began as an epistemological project which dissects the conditions and forms of oppression being experienced by Black people or subjugated groups and the proposition of strategic knowledges needed to imagine liberation in such contexts. It is a process that involves the active thinking of the oppressed in their process of liberation.

People in radically unjust societies must come to an awareness of the injustice of their own specific society by making use of their own resources, or resources that they feel free and comfortable to identify with. Such people must analyze their own society in terms of the requirements of their conception of justice and such an analysis could simultaneously serve the purpose of increasing their self-understanding of the position and role they have in their society.³²

In other words, for any process of freedom to be achieved, oppressed people have to free themselves from the fear that overwhelms their minds, in an attempt to overcome the injustice that they experience. This involves the process of making oneself into a knowing subject/being rather than an object. Since fear and inordinate logic dominates the mind of colonized Blacks, they are faced with the urgent task of freeing themselves from the many complexes engendered by the colonial environment. This step is a necessary prerequisite to the realization of their total liberation.³³ Biko sees his philosophy of Black Consciousness as a system that should foreground this urgent task of mental freedom (achieving a level of mental freedom that can truly grasp or understand the reality of the inordinate structure of the world); this is what drives his distinctive

notion of Black epistemology which emphasizes the role of Black knowledge and Black subjectivity in achieving Black liberation. The liberatory praxis of Black resistance against the forces of colonial domination and imperialistic oppression has at its epicenter, an anticolonial epistemology. It entails the recognition that the first step in the process of disalienation and the pursuit of epistemic freedom as the total eradication of western values implanted in the colonized mind by the colonialists, as well as uprooting the values that ultimately make it difficult for Blacks to reverse their position of subservience and dependency.³⁴ This is the upshot of Biko's philosophy of Black consciousness—the embodiment of a particular attitude of mind or psychological disposition that aims to bring epistemic independence to Black subjects who have been entrapped in the colonial dehumanizing system.

For Biko, the process towards achieving epistemic freedom for Blacks must begin with the recognition that the current condition of subjection in which Black people find themselves are man-made structures designed to take away every iota of their dignity and self-worth. It includes the awareness that these oppressive structures are particularly concocted to sustain the colonial edifice in the so-called “subaltern” regions or colonized geospatial locations, as well as the nefarious empiric aspirations, that are focused not only on cultivating the material resources of these occupied territories but also on the human resources as well. This is why Robert Gildea in *Empires of the Mind*, refers to the aspirations of white colonial empires in these forcefully occupied territories as “parasitic” and extremely deceptive. The colonial edifice supplants the beliefs of indigenous peoples, using guile and myths to make them resent such beliefs as contemptible and inferior to the western axiological systems. This was how myths were developed to legitimate colonial empires; they were presented as forces for good—bringing wealth, order, or civilization. In the end, however, they were based on violence, distortions, and

maintained by force.³⁵ The distortions and abstractions put forward by these white colonialists were based on their material stake in keeping the lid on the truth—the material or economic wealth that was the primary motivation for the forceful invasion of those spaces in the first place—and thereby covering up the social and material debt owed to African people to keep it for themselves.³⁶ In this regard, the artifice of colonial operation should be understood as a form of temporally extended domination by Caucasian people over non-Caucasian people and as such part of the historical universe of forms of intergroup domination, subjugation, oppression, and exploitation motivated by the need for the acquisition of material, social, and political capital.³⁷

One of the principal objectives of systems of domination instituted by white colonialists, wherever it is propagated in the biosphere, whether in Africa, Apartheid South Africa, Asia or in the Americas, is that it targets the lividity of subjugated peoples who are labeled as “the colonized” within a grand scheme of power aggrandizement and white racial supremacy. Such colonialists do not merely seek to dominate the geographical spaces of societies occupied mostly by people of color but they, as a matter of necessity, work to supplant their cultural values and erode such peoples’ identities while projecting false categories or sub-categories of superiority and inferiority that attests to the racial supremacy of the caucasian race. This invented categorization that speaks to the unfounded superiority of the white race, is then sold wholesale to subjugated peoples through the immixing of hegemonic psychology of oppression, the brutal force of the gun, and propagation of a genocidal logics that imposes a new sense of liminal identity. In this regard, Ali A Abdi argues in “Identity Formations and Deformations in South Africa,” that the newly imposed identities, even if they were false, nevertheless fully impacted on the lives of the African population who, perforce, of course, was to obey their colonial status.³⁸ This sense of

existential imposition of imposition during apartheid in South Africa was aptly articulated by Rich Mkhondo thus:

Apartheid convinced my parents that whites were God-like creatures, and they urged me to believe the same. As a young boy, I did not know what apartheid meant; I knew vaguely that there was something wrong with my country when I wanted to play in a park reserved for white children, and my mother spanked me for insisting...[Later,] when I was arrested in 1975 and was found not carrying the compulsory pass for [B]lacks, apartheid, and its ravages began to dawn on me fully. The passbook, or, as white people called it, *dompas* (pass for stupid people) controlled every aspect of our lives.³⁹

What is apparent from what Mkhondo recounts here is that the force of anti-Black racism that undergirds apartheid was constructed on systematic falsities and a blend of virulent racism as well as epistemic violence. The epistemic violence involves making Black people believe lies about their existential inferiority through the enforcement of brutal rules sanctioned by the “colonial state” and macabre policing.

In *Discourse on Colonialism* Aimé Césaire, alludes to this schematic of colonization when he avers that “no one colonizes innocently, that no one colonizes with impunity either; that a nation which colonizes, that a civilization which justifies colonization—and therefore force—is already a sick civilization, a civilization that is morally diseased.”⁴⁰ Thus, Césaire’s observation reveals the intentional content of coloniality and its deployment of force. This banality of force is deployed to ensure that such invented categories of white racial superiority, particularly the concepts of intellectual and spiritual superiority, is vehemently ingrained this into the minds of subjugated and exploited peoples—they make them believe in these false categories of alterity to reinforce the positioning of colonial cultures as possessing superior knowledge and humanity. The philosophical import of what is being described here is that, in an anti-Black/racist world, Black people have been victims of such schemes of psychological domination inherent in the epistemology of oppression ingrained into the structure of colonization. Colonialism and

coloniality can only be successful when the mind of the oppressed internalizes oppression as an existential reality and immutable fact.

In this colonial frame of reference, the notion of “superior knowledge” ought to be seen as a product of “superior humanity,” ascribed to people from Euro-American cultures, which invariably creates its alterity—inferior knowledge equated with inferior humanity. This is how Black people became conditioned to the axis of the epistemologically oppressed or outsiders from the domain of knowledge, under this imaginary. It is through such schemes, hegemonic logic, and oppressive intellectual posturing that western epistemologists have attempted to invent themselves as the fountain of all human knowledge and human civilization. Most systems of human discrimination thrive on an epistemology of oppression—especially when the internalization of such hegemonic epistemologies becomes successful. This fact, when juxtaposed against the livity of Black people both in African and African diasporic contexts, reveals how colonial systems deployed epistemologies of oppression to primarily perpetuate the domination of Black life, Black agency, and Black subjectivity. Thus, the epistemological tenets of Biko’s Black Consciousness are in confrontation against such hegemonic systems that seeks to condition Black people, in the colonial-centric situation, to the zone of alterity and de-humanization.

Thus, to overcome their overpowering sense of alienation and to regain their dignity and self-esteem, Biko maintains, through his philosophy of Black Consciousness that Blacks must strive to believe in their capacity as competent epistemic agents and learn to accept and appreciate their Blackness and to be proud of it. They must resist attempts by white intellectuals to minimize the importance of Black pride; since, in the final analysis, such whites do not understand the fact of Blackness and how it relates to Black Consciousness. Black consciousness

is an ideal that must be pursued relentlessly and ultimately realized by Blacks. Black Consciousness must be projected as a positive thing or an absolute density that is filled with itself. For the Black person it is an essential point of reference and not an absence of or negation of something. It is an epistemological framework that seeks to humanize Blackness.⁴¹ As such, the Black Consciousness Movement was a philosophy of praxis that attempted to eradicate from the Black intellect the inculcated submissiveness that contributed to its enslavement. Consequently, the Movement directed great attention to the problem of the superstructure, for it asserted that the liberation of Black people would begin only when the mental constructs of their inferiority ceased to guide their historical conduct.⁴²

Biko's Black Consciousness philosophy exemplifies one of the strategies Black people have historically utilized to combat the forces of white domination; it was a distinctive epistemological orientation that was largely shaped by the realities and kinds of oppression that was being faced by the Black community in apartheid South Africa. However, the concern in this chapter is to primarily identify the epistemological foundations upon which this philosophical worldview is constructed. In what follows, I argue that the epistemological project behind Biko's philosophy of Black Consciousness is aimed at performing two important functions: first, to provide a systematic analysis of the schema and epistemologies of the oppression that Black people face in an anti-black world, exposing it as psychological warfare. Second, to provide a definitive strategy and praxis on how to combat such epistemologies of oppression to imagine freedom for Black people. It is in this manner that Biko's Black consciousness philosophy should be seen as an anti-colonial epistemology. It is an anticolonial epistemological system that seeks to free Black people from the chains of colonial hegemonic domination. What the tenets of Biko's Black Consciousness philosophy show are how well he understood colonialism and

systems of oppression in an anti-black/racist society as a system that seeks to dominate the mind of Black people, often regarded as the colonized. He also understood that the quest for freedom should be driven by an anticolonial epistemology that functions from two interconnected dimensions: the *cognitive-affective* and the *political* dimensions.

Two Epistemological Dimensions in Biko's Black Consciousness Philosophy

The Commandments of Black Consciousness

An actional, not reactionary, racial moral identity;
psychological freedom from racism, including anti-black racism within black communities; developing an interrelationship between culture and politics;
freedom from the internalization of white superiority and the institutionalization of white privilege;
a delinking from western bourgeois;
the realization of self-determination.⁴³

The epistemological underpinnings of Black Consciousness as construed by Steve Biko symbolizes the assertive power or agential control of the Black subject to avow knowledge ascriptions about the self in the face of brutal epistemic and violent political oppression within systems of coloniality. Black consciousness is intended by Biko as a corrective to the damage that coloniality and oppression have caused Black people, especially Black South Africans. It aims to repudiate the negative categories and existential pathologies, created by the colonial mentality which seeks to negate Black humanity, render Black existence meaningless and restrict Black lives to an abyss of absurdity. This attempt to negate Black humanity is exposed as a concretization of fictitious or false entities, and imaginary Black objects that are deemed to be inferior. This is a casting of white ignorance and racism, devised to maintain false dialectics of superiority and inferiority. The anti-colonial epistemological underpinnings of Biko's Black Consciousness show these are false taxonomies and genus that does not apply to the Black experience.

At a fundamental level, Black Consciousness dealt primarily with the question of the human which emerges from the epistemological project. The epistemological project (anticolonial epistemology) unravels the dehumanizing attributions of non-epistemic schemas and the non-attribution of knowledge characteristic to Black subjects. It also simultaneously focuses on bringing Black subjects/beings closer to their existential horror by making them recognize the fact that it is not them who are wholly at fault for being in the existential hell—but the hegemonic of coloniality that has been projected to undermine their minds and the materiality of their existence. What this shows, is that Biko was preoccupied with the existential condition of Blackness in the anti-black world, and the fundamental questions he posed centers on the existential struggles that haunt Blackness—what it means to exist in Black, in an anti-black world.⁴⁴ This is why Biko avers that the project of achieving liberation through Black Consciousness must begin with a resistant notion of Black subjectivity—making the Black individual come to terms with their self-identity and having a full appreciation of their Blackness. In his magnum opus, *I Write What I Like*, Biko writes thus:

The first step [towards liberation] therefore is to make the [B]lack man come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth. This is what we mean by an inward-looking process. This is the definition of “Black Consciousness.”⁴⁵

It is clear from this assertion that Biko believes that if Black people must break away from the cycle of oppression that holds them bound, they must develop a new mental attitude, a resistant mental attitude that renounces the categories of alterity projected into their Being by the system of coloniality, and cultivate a sense of self-affirmation, self-description that celebrates the beauty in Black existence. Black consciousness thus views humanity as implicit to an awareness that fundamentally constituted the self as much as it was realized outside the self.⁴⁶ In this regard, the

title of Biko's book, *I write what I like*, depicts a powerful metaphor that emphasizes a sense of liberation that focuses on the avowal of Black knowledge—avowing knowledge claims to affirm Black subjectivity and the condition of Black existence in the context of white oppression and more importantly, writing to affirm Black intellect in a world where Black people are thought to be intellectually handicapped.⁴⁷ When Biko maintains that Black Consciousness is an inward-looking process, what is being affirmed is that both the agency and community that informs Blackness is a rallying point for the imagination of Black liberation or freedom. It is contingent on the belief that the agency and shared commitment of Black people should constitute the basis of consciousness-raising. There are two important aspects of anticolonial epistemological formations in Biko's Black Consciousness philosophy that warrants serious philosophical consideration. The first aspect deals with *cognitive-affective epistemology* while the second is concerned with *political epistemology*.

Cognitive-affective epistemology considers the mind as the epicenter of knowledge acquisition, formation, and internalization. The cognitive epistemological dimension of Black Consciousness deals primarily with the mind of Black folks—ensuring the development of some kind of mental resistance to the damage that colonization has done to the Black psyche. Through his emphasis on the mind as a site of struggle for meaning making and self-realization, Biko provides another way of mobilizing the politics of the psyche. He exemplifies a line of psychopolitics that utilizes the terms of psychological experience as a means of consolidating resistances to power.⁴⁸ Biko understands that colonial domination has done a great deal of damage to the mentality of Black folks, particularly those in Apartheid South Africa, which has led to their negative conception of the self that makes it difficult to fight back against such false categories of Being that are projected as categorical truths. As Hashi Tafira observes, “colonial

ontological difference and exteriority of the Other as racially marked, as different, as scum of the earth, as the wretched who is imbricated in the hegemonic epistemic and structures of domination, is a very prominent feature of South African colonial modernity.⁴⁹

However, for Biko, knowing this situation, showing epistemological awareness of this reality is crucial to imagining freedom for Black people. Essentially, Biko sees colonial domination and exploitation as a battle of the mind—especially the link between colonial hegemonic knowledge construction and domination. He sees the hegemonic schemes of white civilization as constructed to ensure white dominance of the world. This is why his notion of Black Consciousness called for the psychological and cultural liberation of the oppressed as a necessary prerequisite for political freedom; in his view, mental emancipation is a precondition to political emancipation.⁵⁰ In this case, the mind is conceived not as an abstract or disembodied entity but as an embodied subjectivity that actively guides affairs in the material world. It is an actionable view of the Black mind, both as an end in itself and as a means to an end. Biko makes references to the cognitive-affective state of the Black subject as the fundamental location for the reimagining of a different future and a different world where Blackness is not condemned to the realms of dehumanization. In other words, the imagining of Blackness through a humanizing lens has to begin with an attitude of the mind that is not trapped in the colonial projection of sub-par psychological traits or categories unto Black bodies. Biko's anticolonial epistemology, therefore, takes root in this insistence that conative states and agency are human traits that Black subjects embody and should display to bring about a new conception of humanity—Black humanity.

It is in a bid to counter such hegemonic posture of coloniality that Biko conceives of Black Consciousness as emblematic of a liberation movement of the mind to counter the faulty

and false patterns of thinking imposed on Black people as colonial subjects. In opposition to self-negating ways of thinking, Biko called for solidarity amongst those whom apartheid labeled ‘non-white,’ emphasizing the need for oppressed groups to identify themselves as an autonomous, creative and potentially powerful solidarity, and to advance the liberation struggle based on the expression of freedom of the mind.⁵¹ This is what Biko means when he referred to being Black as a mental attitude. In his words, “being Black is not a matter of pigmentation—being Black is a reflection of a mental attitude. Merely by describing yourself as Black, you have started on a road to fight towards emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being.”⁵² What this implies is that the road towards freedom must entail a dimension of an epistemology of resistance that focuses on the repair of the Black subject’s psyche that has been brutally damaged by colonialization. From Biko’s perspective then, Black Consciousness meant the realization of an understanding that the emancipation of Blacks and the liberation of society as a whole required mental renaissance of the Black intellect.⁵³ The ultimate goal of this cognitive/affective dimension of Biko’s Black Consciousness is to make Black people overcome this negative sense of self and psychological paranoia that stems from a systematic manipulation of the Black mind by the white race, a race that had long recognized the value of thought control, devised to uphold the conditioning of Black existence to the subliminal level. Biko’s Black Consciousness philosophy emphasized several aspects like African humanism, an affirmation of Black identity and Black solidarity, but one of its most important aspects has to do with psychological emancipation.⁵⁴

This idea of self-reliance that Biko emphasized in his Black Consciousness philosophy is what Daniel Magaziner in “Black Man, You Are on Your Own!” refers to as the politics of the

personal geared towards achieving a proper existential conditions for Black folks. According to Magaziner, “the politics of the personal and the challenges of the intellectual had long resonated in Black South African history. Although student thinkers appropriated symbols and language from their global moment- afros, clenched fists, concerns with “authenticity” and “[B]eingness”- they were also engaged in a deep-rooted local struggle.”⁵⁵ Thinking of the Black Consciousness struggle in this way shows that Biko was interested in ensuring that Black people generally internalized or localize the struggle to the level of the individual and that the negotiations for freedom has to be personalized first before any form of social cohesion or community solidarity could be formed. Part of the power of Black Consciousness lay in its rhetorical force and its sophisticated analysis, which emphasized the psychological dimension of oppression and personal agency, that the oppressed should liberate themselves through a style or way of life.⁵⁶ Biko was interested in making sure that individual Black subjects, personally assess their situations as socially situated subjects within a system that does not recognize them as such, while working out what that means for their process of rediscovery. Although, Biko provided structural frameworks for making such individual negotiations, he was aware that individual circumstances and experiences of Black South Africans under apartheid were not univocal, even though they shared certain similarities in general outlook. This is why Biko’s philosophy of Black Consciousness must be seen as a fluid anticolonial epistemological framework that made it possible for Black South Africans to see themselves in the process of imagining a life independent of colonial impositions. For instance:

From the founding of SASO through 1972, in the pages of the *SASO Newsletter* and other media, student activists defined a new approach to political experience. As they interrogated the category of [B]lackness and demands of consciousness, they developed ideas about what constituted a historically appropriate “attitude of mind,” which would in turn generate a proper way of life.⁵⁷

Although Biko's Black Consciousness can be regarded as a protean movement, it drew from diverse trajectories of ideas constituted in distinct spaces, ideas molded to fit a purpose – to resuscitate Black pride and to generate a renewed project of political empowerment. This notion of Black Consciousness emphasized a 'way of life,' which those oppressed by apartheid should adopt, to embody a liberated mind.⁵⁸

However, one thing that this emphasis on the construction of a way of life, through a historically appropriate attitude of mind had in common is a critical disposition to stand against the categories of coloniality and the forceful rejection of any attempt or philosophical systems that seeks to relegate Blackness to the realm of subalternity. Thus, for Biko, coloniality is first an *empire of the mind* before it materializes into an empire on the land. Therefore, the battle against it must begin at the cognitive-affective level by transforming how Blacks think of themselves and about the world as it is. This is why Biko's construction, "I Write What I Like," is so powerful. It is a testament to the Black agency as the ground for all knowledge that should inform how Black people live their lives. It is a bold conception of the Black subject as an epistemic agent with the intellectual ability or power of the mind to construct knowledge categories as well as existential precepts in the world. In other words, Black people should be the ultimate authority concerning the determination of *what is* and *what is not*. As well as in the divination of rules, values and imperatives and political thought systems that should inform how Black people live in an "othered" universe. It also orient us towards the appreciation of an epistemological worldview that eschews the forms of epistemological precepts that have nothing to do with the Black experience, especially those that are psychologically and materially harmful to the conditions of Black folks in an anti-Black society.

Biko and the advocates of Black Consciousness practiced a politics of psychological empowerment that woke up Black people from their dogmatic slumber. It gave Black people a sense of awakening that unraveled the structures of domination that violently excludes them from the domain of reason and that which also prevents them from having any meaningful political participation in the affairs of their homeland. Thus, the essential political project of Black Consciousness was the overthrow of the yoke of colonialism in its manifested form of apartheid. In this, it shared a deep historical connection with the anti-colonial struggles of the world.⁵⁹ As a leader, Steve Biko challenged Black people to confront their inner fears head-on, including the fear of death. His unique contribution lay in his vision, on a wide scale, of the interrelationship between consciousness and culture, on the one hand, and developmental and political action, on the other.⁶⁰ This brings us to the second epistemological dimension in his philosophy of Black Consciousness—*political epistemology*.

The second epistemological dimension of Biko's Black Consciousness philosophy has to do with the domain of *political epistemology*—a political epistemology construed as crucial to the project of socio-political transformation primarily driven by Black people. Broadly construed, political epistemology ascribes socio-political power to political actors as epistemic agents, authorial knowers, and as change agents. In conditions of socio-political repression, this agential act is often driven by a set of unique political ideas that are formulated in the hope of bringing about positive social change to oppressed groups within society. This understanding of political epistemology, takes seriously, the epistemic life of groups by exploiting collective agency, within such groups as collective power and as an outlet to effect socio-political transformation. It is at this impersonal level where the changes that happen to the Black mind, through cognitive epistemological restructuring, are affected in praxis to initiate political change

or transformation. This, for Biko, includes Blacks taking back their country and political destiny from the hands of the white minority rule. Political epistemology entails the belief that ideas do influence political behavior very heavily, if not entirely. It involves an understanding of the nature of knowledge and beliefs as they are shaped by political actors and institutions.⁶¹ In the movement for Black liberation in South Africa and even in the diaspora, Steve Biko is a notable political actor who understood and worked tirelessly to ensure that Black people understood the connection between political ideas and its influence in bringing about socio-political change.

In looking at Biko's Black Consciousness philosophy through this lens, it reveals a form of political epistemology that affirms the shared experience of Black people as the basis for political action. This is why Biko states that "Black Consciousness is, in essence, the realization by the [B]lack man [Black folks] of the need to rally together of their skin—and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude."⁶² In other words, Biko tapped into notions of solidarity and communal associations that were highly appreciated values within African diasporic communities to build a political epistemology that takes on an anti-colonial character; in terms of the collective rejection of the group denigration that is predominantly espoused in colonial systems of knowledge and practices. As Biko insists on "Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity:"

We [Blacks] must reject, as we have been doing, the individualistic cold approach to life that is the cornerstone of Anglo-Boer culture. We must seek to restore to the [B]lack man [Black folks in general] the great importance we used to give to give to human relations, the high regard for people and their property and for life in general...these are essential features of our [B]lack culture to which we must cling. Black culture above all implies freedom on our part to innovate without recourse to white values.⁶³

Here, Biko emphasized the need for the display or demonstration of intellectual independence in terms of value-judgment and its influence in shaping the trajectory of life and

also the importance of construing the communalistic elements of “Black culture” as a rallying point for the formation of group coalitions in the struggle against the impositions imposed by the colonial powers. Biko’s published essays and speeches strongly suggest that we are, indeed, dealing with a philosophy, a humanist philosophy born in struggle and sustained by faith.⁶⁴ As a political epistemology, Biko theorizes Black Consciousness as a scheme that humanizes Blackness through the emphasis on group associations as a form of an epistemic circle where revolutionary ideas are workshopped, critiqued, and propagated to foster a liberatory consciousness and build chords of solidarity among Black oppressed peoples in South Africa.

We need to read Biko’s Black Consciousness as a radical humanist politics of solidarity that operationalizes Blackness and concomitant notions of identity and culture around the political objective of liberation rather than simply as psychological ends in and of themselves. It is not an operation that was primarily focused on improving human thinking for its own sake; but one that was about directing human thinking towards resolving or tackling social problems. We need to bear in mind that apartheid’s dominance was in many ways, due to its divide-and-conquer approach, which systematically cultivated in-group violence (often along with ethnic lines) within Black communities, preventing, as an absolute strategic imperative—the forging of any overarching unity, and solidarity among the oppressed. It is for this reason that anti-apartheid Black Consciousness maintained the priority of robust and unifying group identity of resistance.⁶⁵ In other words, Biko was very clear that the liberation struggle had to begin with providing knowledge to Blacks about who their true oppressors were as well as the true sources of such oppression. It was a strategy that was deployed to prevent the internalization of oppression that leads to violent ethnic group violence. This is why Biko largely emphasized the importance of group associations and solidarity in the fight against colonial oppression.

This power of group associations became very crucial towards generating episodes of civil disobedience and group protests that constituted serious problems, both locally and internationally for the white minority government in South Africa. As a political epistemology, Black Consciousness emphasized the social, political, and epistemic power that is contained in collective associations, especially when such associations are motivated as a force for socially situated knowledges that could be harnessed to achieve social transformation for Blacks. Biko and other advocates of Black Consciousness with South African understood the role those small Black communities in South Africa including the Black community in diaspora play in the broader goals of achieving liberation and self-government within a repressive state ruled by a white minority. This is why Ramathate Dolamo in “The Legacy of Black Consciousness,” is correct to point out that “Black Consciousness as a philosophy transcends all political organizations and ideologies because its architects were interested in rallying the whole country [and Black people in diaspora] to fight apartheid regardless of political affiliation.”⁶⁶ As Biko himself asserted in an interview with Gail M. Gerhart in October 1972:

People don't commit themselves to ANC or PAC these days. You get people who commit themselves to the struggle. The distinction between ANC and PAC, incidentally, in the eyes of the masses is thin . . . And the nuances of whether one is socialist, one is nationalist, one is this, one is that never got down through into their minds. So that it's an intellectual debate that is meaningless. At home, some guys are emotional about the ANC. But okay, what is ANC? “It's a party for Africans!” You know? It's all he knows about ANC. He might know a leader and admire one—Mandela is the darling of ANC people, and Sobukwe of course darling of the PAC people. But you ask them what the difference is; they don't know. The radical difference that people see at the moment between those groups and us is this solidarity approach we're adopting.⁶⁷

In this situation, Biko was pointing out that one of the problems with the mobilization of Black grassroots political movements during this period was the ideological divisions that were created by plural anticolonial or resistant epistemologies developed within some of the prominent

political units that were active during this period in South Africa, such as the ANC and PAC. He laments how this ideological division creates a form of separatism that does not serve the best interest of Black folks in their quest to be free from colonial oppression. To transcend this problem and achieve better results in this struggle, Biko emphasized Black solidarity as both an epistemological disposition and a political ideal for mobilizing or organizing the Black response to colonial hegemony.

Political epistemology, in this instance, also involves determining individuals or bodies that possess the right to participate in the epistemologies of governance and who has the right to make decisions that affect the destiny of Black people. This right includes the formation of a distinctive political philosophy or worldview that dictates the norms of governance and recognition as well as the axis of power within society. Thus, it could be argued that even the conditions for the production of epistemologies are political in the sense that these conditions reflect social hierarchies of power and privilege to determine who can participate in epistemological discussions and whose views on epistemology have the potential to gain influence.⁶⁸ Biko's Black Consciousness philosophy is clear in its message that Black people are the ones who should have the right to determine the political ideas by which they will be governed and not be governed by the political schemes of the white minority government. This is the crux of Biko's idea of Black solidarity. Two important issues should be raised relating to Black Consciousness and solidarity. The first is the relationship between consciousness and action. This relationship is often neglected by commentators on Black Consciousness; the second is the relationship between mutual knowledge and solidarity- therein exists the connotation of action in solidarity. In other words, one has to be thinking of a consciousness that leads to

action.⁶⁹ It is not a kind of political epistemology that dwells in abstract conceptualizations of categories that have no bearing on material experience.

But Biko saw that Blacks in South Africa had unconsciously resigned themselves to the malaise engendered by the ruling white minority. Recognizing this, Biko emphasized the immediate need for consciousness-raising. And from that recognition was born his concept of Black Consciousness as a kind of political epistemology.⁷⁰

Biko's attempts to raise oppressed subjects beyond the status of abject racial objectification should not as such be taken as a kind of bland moral humanism. Such efforts need rather be understood as part of a political project that acknowledges the degree to which negative (and actively negating) forms of identity can be central features of oppression...It is important not to overlook strident forms of self-critique operationalized by Black Consciousness thought. Far from an unquestioning valorization of Blackness, Biko's Black Consciousness involved self-interrogation as a vital component and was particularly critical of blacks who endorsed the white value system of apartheid, hoping attain privileges for themselves.⁷¹

Both epistemological projects—*cognitive-affective* and *political* epistemologies, are mutually inclusive in that they are geared towards achieving one goal: Black liberation. The impact of Black Consciousness as articulated by Biko and his comrades in the late sixties and seventies goes beyond the organizations forged to propagate and live out that philosophical approach to liberation. It is indeed 'a way of life,' as its proponents were often heard to say and not just political rhetoric.⁷²

While the dimension of political epistemology emphasizes external transformation in terms of the materiality of Black existence, the cognitive/affective dimension emphasizes internal transformation in terms of psychological experience. Biko sees these as two sides of the same coin. As he views it, the interrelationship between the consciousness of the self and the emancipatory program is of paramount importance to the task of Black liberation. Blacks no longer seek to reform the system because so doing implies acceptance of the major points around

which the system revolves. Blacks are out to completely transform the system and to make of it what they wish. Such a major undertaking can only be realized in an atmosphere where people are convinced of the truth inherent in their stand. Liberation, therefore, is of paramount importance in the concept of Black Consciousness, for Blacks cannot be conscious of themselves and yet remain in bondage. They want to attain the envisioned self which is a free self.⁷³ The envisioned free self is the liberated Black self who, having broken free from the chains of colonialism, can now exercise their rights to determining their political and existential destinies. The concept of Black Consciousness held that it was necessary to first effectuate mental emancipation as a precondition to political emancipation; Biko's philosophy was an easy fusion between political thought and psychological reality.⁷⁴ The disposition of the mind has to be transformed into actionable material results.

However, Biko's philosophy of Black Consciousness as an epistemology of resistance is not limited to the African context, it displays some important similarities with the Black struggles against the forces of oppression in the African diasporic contexts as well. This is what Biko conceives as the last step in Black Consciousness:

The last step in Black Consciousness is to broaden the base of our operation. *One of the basic tenets of Black Consciousness is totality of involvement.* This means that all Blacks must sit as one big unit, and no fragmentation and distraction from the mainstream of events to be allowed.⁷⁵

It is a call for an epistemological look at Blackness as a force for ideological and political alliances based on shared human experiences regardless of geospatial peculiarities. Biko's allusion to Blackness as "one big unit," also speaks to the Black intellectual lineage from which he draws his idea of Black Consciousness. The concept of Black Consciousness drew intellectual and political inspiration and dialogue from the civil rights and Black Power movements in the United States, and Negritude, and other forms of post-colonial thinking in Africa.⁷⁶ Most works

on the life and work of Steve Biko locate his thought within the politics of the 1960s, particularly the rise of Black Consciousness in the United States and decolonization movements in Africa.⁷⁷ A case in point is the affinity in the revolutionary ideas of Huey Newton, a co-founder of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, an American revolutionary party founded in the United States in 1966, with that of Steve Bantu Biko, the legendary anti-apartheid activist and co-founder of the South African Student Organization (SASO). The next section of this work focuses on the inferiority complex that Biko concerns himself with as a mechanism that brings about reactionary suicide and something that Newton responds to directly in his reflections on *Revolutionary Suicide* as the way of Black liberation.

Anti-Colonial Epistemological Affinities: Biko and Newton’s Challenge to the Narrative of the “Inferior” Black Subject/Being

Merely by describing yourself as [B]lack, you have started on a road towards emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your [B]lackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being.⁷⁸

~Steve Biko, “The Definition of Black Consciousness”

A historical look at anti-Black oppression through a diasporic lens would reveal that within the structure and framework that Black people have devised to imagine freedom from archetypes of race-based injustice, including racialized epistemic oppression, there have always existed some form of epistemic affinity or interaction depicting shared grounds for resistant coalitions. Biko’s development of the philosophy of Black Consciousness to counter the problem of Black inferiority in South Africa connects with Huey P. Newton’s analysis of reactionary suicide as a heuristic to directly address the inferiority complex that renders Black subjects powerless in the face of virulent anti-black racism in the United States. This is an archetypal example for such grounds of epistemological affinities that are of interest here. Especially

focusing on way Biko concentrated his critiques of white racism on the problem of inferiority complex as a product of the psychological warfare waged against Black subjects by the structures of white power within apartheid South Africa and how Newton developed similar critiques against the structures of white power in the United States as a mechanism that brings about reactionary suicide, a condition of deep psychological paralysis or spiritual death.

Worthy of note is the fact that these ideas were not developed out of thin air; they were largely influenced by the struggles against white colonial policies, practices, and legal doctrines that seek to keep Black people within and outside the African diaspora in a perpetual state of existential comatose. There were influences beyond South Africa that helped Biko and others to formulate the Black Consciousness philosophy, for it is not a new phenomenon on the global map. The advocates of Black Consciousness, especially in the South African context, were avid readers and they followed very attentively political developments in Africa and beyond. For example, Biko read extensively, the works of the American Black Power ideology, Kwame Ture (aka Stockley Carmichael), Charles Hamilton, Franz Fanon, Martin Luther King Jr., and Paul Freire including Elijah Muhammad.⁷⁹ The development of Black Consciousness philosophy coincided with a period that was also marked by many colonized countries in Africa getting their independence (South Africa would follow much later in 1994).⁸⁰ What the American Black Power ideology provided as a theoretical source for the renewal of Black South African thinking (psychological subjectivity). It accelerated the development of the Movement helping to transform existential feelings into ethical-political conceptions of the world.⁸¹

Both Biko and Newton understood that Blacks can never achieve freedom both individually and corporately from the oppressive white systems of power in their specific contexts of struggle except the problem of inferiority complex is addressed. For instance, in his

paper, “White Racism and Black Consciousness,” Biko argues that Black consciousness is about ridding the Black “minds of imprisoning notions (such as the idea that Blacks are inferior beings) which are the legacy of the control of their attitude by whites.”⁸² This is why he was vehemently against the totality of white racist takeover of Black lives so much so that Blacks living in South Africa in the mid-60s could not even formulate any coherent, cogent and meaningful perspective on their livity and political destiny within a society they called “home.” For Biko, the strategy to overcome this problem of white supremacy should include:

...any changes which are to come can only come as a result of a program worked out by black people – and for black people to be able to work out a program they needed to defeat the one main element in politics which was working against them: a psychological feeling of inferiority which was deliberately cultivated by the system.⁸³

This emphasis on the psychological subjectivity of struggle is evident in the different descriptions of Black Consciousness as a tool for dismantling the ultimate consequence of white oppression—The black inferiority complex. As Biko succinctly puts it, “from this [conditions on anti-black oppression] it becomes clear that as long as blacks are suffering from inferiority complex — a result of 300 years of deliberate oppression, denigration, and derision — they will be useless as co-architects of a normal society where man is nothing else but man for his own sake.”⁸⁴

Similarly, in his development of the concept of revolutionary suicide, Newton developed the concept of reactionary suicide as a false psychological disposition that is triggered in Blacks by their experience of extreme anti-black racist oppression in the United States. He picks up the same concerns that Biko raised in his philosophy of Black Consciousness concerning the problem of Black inferiority, which he described as—reactionary suicide—the reaction of a Black subject who takes their own life in response to negative social conditions that overwhelm

them and condemn them to existential helplessness, especially those who have been deprived their right to live as proud and free human beings.⁸⁵ In Newton's view:

“connected to reactionary suicide, although even more painful and degrading, is a spiritual death that has been the experience of millions of Black people in the United States. This death is found everywhere today in the Black community. Its victims have ceased to fight the forms of oppression that drink their blood.”⁸⁶

Here, Newton is emphasizing the social rather than personal factors as the principal cause of suicidal behavior among Blacks. This struck a chord with him because he observed that, as a young Black man, he was living at a time when suicides among his contemporaries had doubled. Also, Newton observed amongst Black's hopelessness, demoralization, and apparent acceptance of their oppression which he termed ‘reactionary suicide.’⁸⁷

Like Newton, Biko always centered the possibility for change within the subjectivity of the oppressed person, and not within the hierarchy of the South African hegemonic system (an inversion of power).⁸⁸ This is why Biko sees Black Consciousness as the essence of the Black individual's strive to elevate their position by positively looking at those value systems that make them distinctively human in society.⁸⁹ It is under this new vision of Black individuality that they can arrive at the concept of *being human* in society. Since Newton imagines reactionary suicide as a function of a false notion of inferiority that is sold to Blacks by the antics of oppressive white power structures, he makes a case for revolutionary suicide as a way for Blacks to rupture these oppressive structures and gain psychological freedom from the imprisonment of the imposed colonial logics through self-assertion and the revamping of the Black mindset. Newton fundamentally believes that man makes himself, which is why “man attempts to define phenomena in such a way that they reflect the interests of his own class or group. He gives titles or values to phenomena according to what he sees as beneficial.”⁹⁰ In this vein, Blacks need to define themselves not in the language of psychological dependency but that of self-authorship

that is driven by an authentic expression of their intellectual capabilities and psychological dispositions as functional elements of their existence rather than as a collection of encapsulated abstract entities that is eternally shut out from the material world. This goes to show how Newton directly responds to the same problem of inferiority complex as a fundamental tool of white oppression directed at Black folks in the United States comparable to the terrible experiences of Blacks in apartheid South Africa.

The discussion on the epistemological affinities that Black Consciousness philosophy shares with the concept of Blackness in the American Black Power movement, is particularly narrowed down to the thoughts of Biko and Newton because there are many areas where their ideas and perspectives overlap on the mobilization of Black intellect against white hegemonic empiric impulses. The ideological affinities between these two Black thinkers of the Black radical tradition further reinforce the idea that Black Consciousness as a philosophy for Black social mobilization against the white racial empire is not a static formation but a fluid system that is capable of being adapted to different geospatial territories where Blacks experience the negative impacts of colonial hegemony and racialized treatment. In other words, the connections between the revolutionary thoughts on resistance by Biko and Newton codifies Black anticolonial epistemologies as a product of a living philosophical thought process that is capable of struggling against anti-Black oppression of many fronts. Especially in the light of the fact that the developments in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s and anti-colonial movements in the so-called “Third World” (African diaspora), during this period were also importantly and intricately connected, especially with the Black Consciousness movement in Azania South Africa.⁹¹

The 1960s and 1970s were one of the momentous periods in the twentieth century when white repression and anti-Black oppression took on a forceful, cataclysmic, and violent global character. In the United States, the agitations of Civil Rights for Black folks, inspired by the movement for the Black revolution, gained momentum, reaching its legislative and judicial summit. Although this did not lead to material gains as there were record-high numbers of unemployment, social exclusion from assistance programs, capped by relatively low income and predominant police brutality against members of the Black community. This snowballed into all kinds of violent responses such as race riots, guerrilla warfare against the government of the United States, and massive conflagrations that were witnessed in many American cities. It was also in this period that the Black Panther Party led by Huey P. Newton and Booby Searle mobilized Black communities across the United States to fight against police brutality and the repression of members of the Black community. Meanwhile, in the African diaspora, the wave for political independence from years of colonial rule in Africa by European countries like Britain, France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal was sweeping through the continent inspired by the vociferous critiques of the ideals of European modernity, its mechanism of capitalist exploitation and the arrogance of Western colonial power-structure by scholars such as Leopold Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah, Obafemi Awolowo, and Julius Nyerere.⁹² Yet, it was during this same period that Dutch colonialists that constituted the white minority government in South Africa were consolidating their colonial power on occupied African territories through the institutionalization of apartheid—a racist system of government that conceives of Black people as animals rather than as humans. This was a period when Blackness was entangled in the drama of existence occasioned by the perpetual struggle against colonial systems.

Both Newton and Biko understood that the drama of existence for Black folks under any colonial regime, institutions, or systems are fraught with psychopathologies created by the colonialists to destroy the Black subject's lived experience. They agree that the goal of colonization is to make Black people internalize and accept epistemologies of oppression as a fact of life and they both worked tirelessly to develop anti-colonial epistemologies focused on rupturing such systems of hegemony. According to Hashi Tafira, "stolen land and inferiorization of [B]lack people provoked the rise of Black Consciousness movements of which Biko is known as its most able articulator in South Africa. But genealogically speaking, Black Consciousness is traceable to the Diaspora."⁹³ This intersection of the philosophy of Black Consciousness is propelled by the similarity of the schemas of white oppression against Black people in African and African diasporic contexts. In South Africa, as in the United States, coloniality was not only the arrival of an economic system of labor and capital and extraction of surplus value, but it was also a hotchpotch power structure that included the cultural, spiritual, religious and cosmological aspects. Thus, we see a colonial power matrix that is multidimensional, multitudinous, and latitudinal, with race being the primary criterion for structural individuation.⁹⁴ This is why the attempts to combat the colonial matrix of power also takes on a multidimensional outlook based on the specificity of regional experiences by Black oppressed subjects.

The imaginations of Biko and Newton intersect on the two epistemological dimensions of Black Consciousness, as explored in this chapter and on the view that these precepts are necessary to ensure Black liberation or freedom, both psychologically and physically. Newton, like Biko, emphasized the role of *cognitive-affective* epistemology in achieving mental emancipation or psychological freedom from colonial schemas. For instance, while he was talking to the Black Panther movement in 1968, Newton asserts thus: "we have a mind of our

own. We've regained our mind that was taken from us and we will decide the political as well as the practical stand that we'll take against white domination."⁹⁵ Newton further notes that the historical relationship between Black and white in America has been the relationship between the slave and the master; the master being the mind—whites and the slave the body—black. The slave would carry out the orders that the mind demanded him to carry out. By doing this, the master took the manhood from the slave because he stripped him of a mind. He stripped Black people of their minds.⁹⁶ This implies that he stripped him of agency and rendered him politically impotent. Thus, Newton like Biko, believes that Black liberation should begin with liberating the minds of Black people from the shackles of white domination and oppression. The idea that Black people have a mind of their own, as expressed by Newton, is an affirmation of an anticolonial epistemology of the *cognitive-affective* variant grounded on the notion of an authentic expression of *embodied Black subjectivity* that assumes the positionality of a self-authorial epistemic and political agent in the world. Therefore, to change the environment (material conditions of Blacks) is to change the mind at a phenomenal level.⁹⁷

Both Biko and Newton are revolutionaries in the true sense of the word. They held similar worldviews about the fact that the movement for Black liberation must begin with the construction of an anticolonial epistemology—*political* and *cognitive-affective* epistemological systems that are fortified with the power of Black agency and motivated by the imaginations of freedom. In this case, a true revolutionary is conceived as someone who recognizes the importance of Blacks exercising agency in the quest for liberation or freedom. This centrality of the place of Black agency in the process of liberation is highlighted by the distinction that Newton draws between reactionary and revolutionary suicide. For Newton, reactionary suicide is the reaction of a person who takes his own life in response to social conditions that overwhelm

him and condemn him to helplessness.⁹⁸ This form of reaction lacks the exercise of agency because a person whose self is dead, or who allows the self to die vainly, is a victim of what Newton calls reactionary suicide and has engaged in murdering the self or self-murdering. He diagnosed that connected to this notion of reactionary suicide, although even more painful and degrading, is a spiritual death that has been the experience of millions of Black people in the United States. As Newton sees it, this death is found everywhere today in the Black community. Its victims have ceased to fight the forms of oppression that drink their blood.⁹⁹ This implies that no condition of oppression will give way to freedom except some form of assault is wielded against the hegemonic epistemologies upon which such oppressive systems are constructed and this is the reason why Newton advocates revolutionary suicide over and above reactionary suicide. In his own words:

I do not think that life will change for the better without an assault on the Establishment, which goes on exploiting the wretched of the earth. This belief is at the heart of the concept of revolutionary suicide. Thus, it is better to oppose the forces that would drive me to self-murder than to endure them. Although I risk the likelihood of death, there is at least the possibility, if not the probability, of changing intolerable conditions. This possibility is important because much in human existence is based upon hope without any real understanding of the odds.¹⁰⁰

Newton speaks of revolutionary/liberatory consciousness as a psychological disposition that is crucial for raising (Black) consciousness.¹⁰¹ It is constructed on a framework of resistance that advocates the exercise of Black agency, as well as a radical (anticolonial) epistemology, in a manner that directly confronts systems of oppression even if ultimately this results in death; for Newton, such death has a meaning that reactionary suicide can never have. It is the price of self-respect.¹⁰² Steve Biko also expressed similar revolutionary thoughts about Black Consciousness in an interview given three months before his final imprisonment. It was published in *New Republic* magazine in January of 1978. In this piece, Biko states that:

You are either alive and proud or you are dead, and when you are dead, you can't care anyway. And your method of death can itself be a politicizing thing. So you die in the riots. For a hell of a lot of them, there's nothing to lose—almost literally, given the kind of situations that they come from. So if you can overcome the personal fear for death, which is a highly irrational thing, you know, then you're on the way to liberation.¹⁰³

This revolutionary thinking exhibited by Biko and Newton is conceived as a vehicle that will transform the attitudes and thinking of Black people including generations to come. It is revolutionary because it rejects the old approaches to liberation, old slogans, protests, and meaningless rhetoric of previous years in the struggle against white domination and oppression.

There is also a manifest connection between Biko and Newton on the relevance of collective Black agency in the quest for Black liberation. Biko calls this “Group Pride” and Newton refers to a similar phenomenon as “revolutionary intercommunalism.” In “Black Consciousness and the Quest for True Humanity,” Biko asserts that “the philosophy of Black consciousness, therefore expresses group pride and the determination by [B]lacks to rise and attain the envisaged self. Freedom is the ability to define one's self, possibilities, and limitations held back, not by the power of people over you.”¹⁰⁴ This draws on the philosophy of peoplehood, embracing the shared experiences of Black people including their shared commitments as a source for envisioning and actualizing freedom. To break the chains of oppression asphyxiating Black existence, Biko advocated solidarity among Black people. Black solidarity is a solid commitment to the resistance of white domination and oppression.¹⁰⁵ The lived experience of blacks demands that they engage in a Black solidarity strategy, which constitutes the aim to liberate themselves.¹⁰⁶ In a similar fashion in “War Against the Panthers,” Newton, affirms that The Black Panther Party¹⁰⁷ (BPP) was formed in the United States in 1966 as an organization of Black and poor persons embracing a common ideology, identified by its proponents as “revolutionary intercommunalism.”

A central tenet of revolutionary intercommunalism, for example, is that “contradiction is the ruling principle of the universe,” that everything is in a constant state of transformation. Recognition of these principles gave Party leaders an ability to grow through a self-criticism that many other radical political organizations seemed to lack¹⁰⁸.

This concept of Black solidarity and revolutionary intercommunalism are not merely theoretical concepts; they had a significant, positive impact on the materiality of Black existence in African and African diasporic struggles against the forces of colonial domination. It is this idea of Group Pride or solidarity that led to the numerous survival programs initiated by the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa and the Black Panther Party (BPP) under the respective leadership of Biko and Newton. As Newton notes, “a second distinguished characteristic of the Party has been its specific strategy to achieve revolutionary intercommunalism: the building of ‘survival’ or community service programs. The purpose of these programs is to enable people to meet their daily needs by developing positive institutions within their communities and to organize the communities politically around these programs.”¹⁰⁹

David Hilliard describes the objective of the Black Panther community programs succinctly by avowing that, to achieve its goals of organizing and serving Black and oppressed communities, the Black Panther Party developed a wide variety of survival programs since the party’s founding in October 1966. The programs, which cover such diverse areas as health care and food services, protection from police brutality, as well as a model school, decent housing, freedom is meant to meet the needs of the community until such a time when the social conditions that make it impossible for the people to afford the things they need and desire shall be eradicated.¹¹⁰ Similarly, through the SASO and BCM movements, Biko was able to provide welfare community programs to poor Black people in South Africa like free health care, education, feeding program through what he tagged as the Black community programs. The

linkage between Biko's Black Consciousness movement—Black Community Programs (BCP) and the Black Panther Party's Ten Point programs is striking. It represents the intersectionality of Black resistant epistemologies towards achieving freedom from colonial domination and racial oppression within African and African diasporic contexts. Thus, Hashi Tafira is right to point out that the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), in particular, borrowed from anti-colonial struggles in Africa and the diaspora, as well as the meaning of Black Conscious, especially the militancy of Huey P. Newton, Bobby Seale, Eldridge Cleaver, Stokely Carmichael [Kwame Ture] and Paulo Freire.¹¹¹

One point that deserves to be mentioned is how these concepts of Black solidarity and Group pride connects to the Black power movement— this idea of collective epistemology as the basis for Black resistance. For instance, we see a pronounced linkage of this collective epistemology of resistance in African and African diasporic contexts crystalized in Carmichael's liberatory project which advocates a movement from Black Power to Pan-Africanism. In *Stokely Speaks Black Power Back to Pan-Africanism* Stokely Carmichael, made this explicitly clear by asserting thus: “we [Blacks] must organize the Black community power to end these abuses, and to give the Negro community a chance to have its needs expressed.”¹¹² Carmichael also taught lessons in Black Consciousness at the “Free Huey” rally in Oakland, California, in February 1968, where he began to advocate the concept that all persons of African descent, regardless of where they were born or lived, were Africans, and that Black revolutionaries must develop the concept of “undying love” Black people, and the necessity of joining the nine hundred million Africans scattered around the globe.¹¹³ Carmichael also considers the concept of Black Power as that which entails seeing the Black struggle for freedom as a global phenomenon. As he puts it, “Black power, to us, means that [B]lack people see themselves as a part of a new force,

sometimes called the Third World; that we see our struggle as closely related to liberation struggles around the world.”¹¹⁴

What the foregoing shows are the transnational relevance of the anticolonial epistemology of Black Consciousness to Black struggles against oppression, especially in the African and African diasporic contexts. It encompasses two connected epistemologies of resistance—*cognitive-affective* and *political* epistemologies, which focus on enabling Black people to achieve freedom and self-definition in the anti-Black world. What is of utmost significance is how these dimensions of anticolonial epistemologies are deployed to challenge the hegemonic constructions of the Black existence as a subaltern. Thus, Black Consciousness is all about repositioning the epistemological worldviews of Black people in a positive direction—towards achieving both personal and collective liberation. This is why Biko’s thoughts about the positivity of the notion of Black Consciousness is apposite. According to Biko, the call for Black Consciousness is the most positive call to come from any group in the Black world for a long time. It is more than just a reactionary rejection of whites or white schemas by Blacks. Its quintessence rests on the realization by the Black people that to feature well in the game of power politics, they have to use the concept of group power to build a strong foundation for survival. For being a historically, politically, socially, and economically disinherited and dispossessed group, they have the strongest foundation from which to operate. Thus, the philosophy of Black Consciousness expresses group pride and the determination by Blacks to rise and attain the envisaged self.¹¹⁵ The envisaged self that Biko refers to here is the liberated Black self—a *Being* with infinite possibilities.

In sum, this chapter advocates a reading of Biko’s Black Consciousness philosophy as a form of anti-colonial epistemology that shows its influence as a framework for achieving

liberation from mental and political oppression. Since racism and colonial domination targets the mind and the socio-political circumstances of Black people, Black Consciousness—as conceived by Biko, seeks to combat these as a two-prong struggle—the first aspect focuses on mental emancipation while the second focuses on political freedom. Black Consciousness conscientious Black people regarding the conditions in which they live so that they can grapple with their problems; with a mental and physical awareness of their situation to find solutions they can provide for themselves and not look towards externally generated solutions.¹¹⁶ This chapter also highlights the relevance of Black Consciousness in African and African diasporic contexts by way of showing the intersectionality of Black anticolonial epistemologies for combatting epistemic oppression, colonial impulses, and from hegemonic political and epistemic systems, especially the brutal colonial encounter which facilitates the alienation of Black subjects from themselves. The example of the connections between the thoughts of Biko and Newton was explored as evidence of the transitional nature of Black anticolonial epistemologies as developed in different experiential contexts. Even though the thoughts of these Black thought leaders were espoused and propagated within two different but analogous Black liberation movements, namely, the Black Panthers Movement in the United States and the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, both in the 1960s through the 70s, they shared similar characteristics in fighting the problem of global white supremacy and colonial hegemony. Through the emphasis of the two epistemological dimensions that are emphasized in this work, these revolutionary exemplars, brought about a paradigm shift in the philosophical, cultural and revolutionary thinking of Black people not just about being in the world but about a *Being* thriving in the world, and they also gave voice to what it means to find meaning as a Black subject in an anti-Black world.

References

1. Steve Biko, "We Blacks," in *I Write What I Like* (Johannesburg, SA: Heinemann Publishers, 1978), 28.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 29.
5. Ibid., 30.
6. Mabogo Percy More, *Biko: Philosophy, Identity and Liberation* (Cape Town, SA: HSRC Press, 2017), 16.
7. Robert Fatton, Jr., *Black Consciousness in South Africa: The dialectics of Ideological Resistance to White Supremacy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986), 45.
8. Politicians from several European countries oversaw the conquest of sub-Saharan Africa at the end of the nineteenth century, dividing the bulk of the continent between the governments of Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, and Spain. While their motives varied, they tended to be optimistic about the potential wealth of the new territories in terms of both natural resources and labor pools. They also embraced a vague mandate to "civilize," "improve," and "develop" the populations they ruled, setting up governance structures that invested officials, usually unfamiliar with the regions, with far more political and cultural power than most Africans possessed. See Helen Tilley, "Medicine, Empires, and Ethics in Colonial Africa," *AMA Journal of Medicine* 18, no. 7 (2016): 744.
9. Kolela Mangcu, *Biko: A Life* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2012), 39.
10. Robert Fatton, Jr., *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 45.
11. Ibid., 57.
12. Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like* (Johannesburg, SA: Heinemann Publishers, 1978), 27.
13. Kogila Moodley, "The Continued Impact of Black Consciousness in South Africa," *The Journal of Modern Studies* 29, no. 2 (1991): 237.
14. This remark by Biko is part of a broader point he makes about the central thesis of Black Consciousness philosophy. The complete thought is as follows: "At the heart of this kind of thinking is the realization by the blacks that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed." See Steve Biko, *I write What I Like* (London: The Bowerdean Press, 1978), 68.
15. Steve Biko, "We Blacks," in *I Write What I Like*, 46.
16. Ibid., 32.
17. Ibid.
18. Steve Biko, "The Definition of Black Consciousness," In *The African Philosophy Reader*, eds. P. H. Coetzee and A. P. Roux (London: Routledge, 1998), 360.
19. Ibid.

20. The radical ideas of Fanon and other revolutionary Black thinkers became available at the most critical juncture in the liberation struggle of Azania. This was the time when the political attitudes and activities of the Blacks were dominated by general apathy and fear after the banning of the ANC and the PAC by the South African government. At the time the predominant currents of thought, prior to the emergence of the Black Consciousness philosophy, were represented by the underground liberation organizations, the ANC and the PAC. The political philosophy of the ANC was a combination of liberal nationalism and Christian reformist ideas that became the inspiration and basis of an ANC document called the Freedom Charter. The Political ideology of the PAC as an orthodox type of African nationalism that projected the basic concept of Anton Lembede, the founding member and first president of the ANC Youth League. The ideological orientation of the PAC also reflected the pan-Africanist principles of George Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah. See. Thomas K. Ranuga, "Franz Fanon and Black Consciousness in Azania (South Africa)," *Phylon* 47, no. 3 (1986): 182, 186.

21. For instance, one can draw poignant similarities between the philosophical ideas of Steve Biko and revolutionary thinkers in African diaspora like Kwame Nkrumah who developed the anti-colonial political thought system known as *consciencism*. Basically, conscientization refers to people's becoming critically aware of the possibilities of their life situations, systematically and sustainably examining the alternatives, and confidently adopting the most effective method and means of social and radical development. Specifically, and quite relevantly for the South African case, systems of conscientization were definitely in place, for, without that being the case, the oppressed communities under the weight of colonial exploitation. See. Ali A. Abdi, "Identity Formations and Deformations in South Africa: A Historical and Contemporary Overview," *Journal of Black Studies* 30, no. 2 (November 1999): 150.

22. Gail M. Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 291.

23. Thomas K. Ranuga, 183.

24. Henie Lotter, "The Intellectual Legacy of Stephen Bantu Biko (1946-1977)," *Acta Academia* 24 (1992): 2.

25. Lindy Wilson, "Bantu Stephen Biko: A Life," in *in Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko & Black Consciousness*, eds. N. Barney Pitso, Mamphela Ramphele, Malusi Mpumlwana and Lindy Wilson (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1991), 16.

26. Ali A. Abdi, "Identity Formations and Deformations in South Africa," 150.

27. Gail M. Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*, 272.

28. Robert Fatton, Jr., *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 76.

29. Steve Biko, "We Blacks," in *I Write What I Like*, 30.

30. Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni asserts further that the struggle against colonial hegemony (resurgent struggles) do not suddenly without certain causative factors. In his view, resurgent struggles for epistemic freedom are provoked by the reality of continued entrapment of knowledge production in Africa within Euro-North American colonial matrices of power. Since power and knowledge are inextricably intertwined, control of the domain of knowledge generation and knowledge cultivation remain very important for the maintenance of asymmetrical global power structures in place since the dawn of Euro-North American-centric modernity. See. Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom: Deprovincialization and Decolonization* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 3, 8.

31. The English Language as a means of educating Black South Africans was one of those vestiges of the archeology of Colonial culture that Biko vehemently attacks. After matriculating at St Francis College, Biko went to the University of Natal in Wentworth in 1966 to study medicine. But while he was there, medicine was not his only preoccupation; politics became also central to his activities. He became a member of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). A defining moment politically dawned upon him when he attended NUSAS conference held at Rhodes University, South Africa in 1967. During this period, he strongly opposed the stealth and overt methods that the western system of education reinforces the myth of the inferiority of Black folks. He maintains that the use of the English language disadvantaged Black students in that they were unable to follow discussions and make meaningful contributions and the white students exploited this deficiency. Black students accepted almost everything without question. Black students felt inadequate and not smart enough to engage their fellow white students in such a foreign language. At that conference, Biko felt that a different kind of mental attitude must be created to counteract the white superiority or black inferiority mentality complex prevalent at the time. This led to an articulation of his philosophy known as Black Consciousness (BC) which led, in turn, to an all-Black student organization called 'South African Students Organization' (SASO). See. Ramathate T. Dolamo, "The Legacy of Black Consciousness: Its Continued Relevance for Democratic South Africa and its Significance for Theological Education," *Theological Studies* 73, no.3 (2017): 1-2.

32. Henie Lotter, "The Intellectual Legacy of Stephen Bantu Biko (1946-1977)," *Acta Academia* 24 (1992): 4.

33. Thomas K. Ranuga, "Franz Fanon and Black Consciousness in Azania (South Africa), 183.

34. Ibid.

35. Robert Gildea goes on to argue that empires should never be seen as a single thing. Rather, they should be seen as a protean and often interconnected systems that takes many different forms. Though empires were protean, they generally took one of three forms: empires of trade, colonies of settlement and territorial empires. Myths of empire held that intrepid sailors and bold investors forged new trade routes, that pioneering colonists cleared virgin territories and made them fertile, and that enlightened administrators followed them to ensure the benign rule of the mother country. The purpose of these myths was to make colonization palatable to peoples at home concerned about the costs and risks of war, but they concealed the realities of empire. The most profitable trade in the eighteenth century was the slave trade, providing slave labor for the plantations of the Caribbean and American colonies. Trade was generally imposed on reluctant non-European empires or their vassals by force, sending in the gunboats where necessary and imposing 'unequal treaties' which enshrined the privileges of the Europeans. Colonial settlements did not take place in virgin lands but entailed the displacement, often the massacre of indigenous populations, and subjection of the rest to segregation and exceptional laws. Imperial rule over large territories was authoritarian. While the colonies of white settlement – from Canada to South Africa and Australia, and the French and European settlers of Algeria – acquired substantial powers of self-government, and imperial rule was always happy to work with local princes and tribal rulers, the vast majority of indigenous peoples were systematically excluded from the prospect of exercising power, and, if they laid claim to it, were brutally

suppressed. See. Robert Gildea, *Empires of the Mind: The Colonial Past and the Politics of the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 2, 15.

36. Omali Yeshita, *Stolen Black Labor: The Political Economy of Domestic Colonialism* (Oakland, CA: Burning Spear Publications, 1983), 4.

37. Patrick Ziltener and Daniel Kunzler, “Impacts of Colonialism: A Research Survey,” *American Sociological Association* 19, no. 2 (2013): 291.

38. Ali A. Abdi, “Identity Formations and Deformations in South Africa,” 153.

39. Rich Mkhondo, *Reporting South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1993), v.

40. Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, Joan Pinkham, Trans. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 17-18.

41. See. Thomas K. Ranuga, 183-184.

42. Robert Fatton, Jr., *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 57.

43. Baldwin Ndaba, Therese Owen, Masego Panyane, Rabbie Serumula and Janet Smith, *The Black Consciousness Reader* (South Africa: Jacana Media, 2017), 21.

44. Tendayi Sithole, *Steve Biko: Decolonial Meditations of Black Consciousness* (New York: Lexington Books, 2016), 3.

45. Steve Biko, *I write What I Like*, 29.

46. Shannen L. Hill, *Biko’s Ghost: The Iconography of Black Consciousness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 6.

47. Tendayi Sithole makes reference to the power in Biko writing styles in his investigation of the thrust of Biko’s political epistemology as an exercise in self-definition. He affirms that through the politics of writing, while looking at Biko’s thought, emerges another form of politics—that is, the politics of self-definition. It is through writing that Biko defines the political course of Black Consciousness and advocates the forms of life that should be pursued. In this form of writing, the definition of the self is not in the narcissistic sense, but the self as that which is living for the other. See. Tendayi Sithole, *Steve Biko: Decolonial Meditations of Black Consciousness* p.7.

48. Derek Hook, *The Mind of Apartheid: A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 22.

49. Hashi Kenneth Tafira, *Black Nationalist Thought in South Africa: The Persistence of an Idea of Liberation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 2.

50. Derek Hook, *The Mind of Apartheid*, 23.

51. *Ibid.*, 25.

52. Steve Biko, *I write What I Like*, 48.

53. Robert Fatton, Jr., *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 78.

54. Vuyisile Msila, “Stephen Biko’s Philosophy and Its Pedagogical Implications in South Africa,” *Creative Education* 4, no. 8 (2013): 492.

55. Daniel Magaziner, “‘Black Man, You Are on Your Own!’ Making Race Consciousness in South African Thought, 1968-1972,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 42, no. 2 (2009): 226.

56. Ian M. Macqueen, *Black Consciousness and Progressive Movements under Apartheid* (South Africa: KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2018), 6.

57. *Ibid.*, 225.

58. Ian M. Macqueen, 4.

59. Ibid., 5.
60. Xolela Mangcu, *Biko: A Life* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2012), 272.
61. It is undeniable that ideas play a role in politics. If we define “ideas” broadly as synonymous with something like beliefs or people’s reasons for acting, then I think it’s clear that the only real way we have of explaining action is by appeal to the reasons, beliefs, or ideas of the actor. See. Scott Althaus, Mark Bevir, Jeffrey Friedman, Helene Landemore, Rogers Smith and Susan Stokes, “Roundtable on Political Epistemology,” *Critical Review: A Journal of Politics and Society* 26, nos. 1/2 (2014): 6, 11.
62. Steve Biko, *I write What I Like*, 49.
63. Steve Biko, “Black Consciousness and the Quest for a true Humanity,” *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Philosophy* 8, no.3 (1978): 18.
64. Michael Cloete, “Steve Biko: Black Consciousness and the African Other-The Struggle for the Political,” *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 24, no.2 (2019):106.
65. Derek Hook, *The Mind of Apartheid*, 26.
66. Ramathate T. Dolamo, “The Legacy of Black Consciousness,” 1.
67. Gail M. Gerhart, “Interview with Steve Biko,” *In Biko Lives! Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko*, Eds. Andile Mngxitama, Amanda Alexander and Nigel C. Gibson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 33.
68. Linda Alcoff, “How is Epistemology Political,” *Radical Philosophy*, (Forthcoming), 66.
69. N.C. Manganyi, *Being Black in the World* (Johannesburg: SPRO-CAS/RAVAN, 1973), 21.
70. Millard Arnold, Ed. *The Testimony of Steve Biko: Black Consciousness in South Africa*, (London: Granada Publishing, 1979), xiv.
71. Derek Hook, *The Mind of Apartheid*, 27.
72. N. Barney Pityana, Mamphela Ramphele, Malusi Mpumlwana and Lindy Wilson, “Introduction,” in *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko & Black Consciousness*, eds. N. Barney Pityana, Mamphela Ramphele, Malusi Mpumlwana and Lindy Wilson (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1991), 9.
73. Steve Biko, *I write What I Like*, 49.
74. It is the concept of Black Consciousness, Black awareness, that will stand as Biko’s most lasting contribution to the liberation struggle in South Africa. It, like no other doctrine before it, uplifted a mass of people, inspired hope and gave direction and purpose to Black lives. See. Millard Arnold, ed. *The Testimony of Steve Biko*, xix.
75. Steve Biko, “Black Consciousness and the Quest for a true Humanity,” 19.
76. Lindy Wilson, “Bantu Stephen Biko: A Life,” in *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko & Black Consciousness*, eds. N. Barney Pityana, Mamphela Ramphele, Malusi Mpumlwana and Lindy Wilson (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1991), 27.
77. Xolela Mangcu, *Biko: A Life*, 33.
78. Steve Biko, “The Definition of Black Consciousness,” 360.
79. Biko picked his way through books, including Carmichael’s; surely, then, he had noted the role that consciousness played there. “A new consciousness among black people, Hamilton and Carmichael wrote, “will make it possible for us [Black people] to proceed.” It would provide a “sense of people hood” from which progress would come. See. Daniel R. Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968-1977* (Athens: Ohio University

Press, 2010), 50 and Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), viii.

80. Ramathate T. Dolamo, “The Legacy of Black Consciousness,” 3.

81. Robert Fatton, Jr., *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 75.

82. Steve Biko, in *I Write What I Like*, 68.

83. *Ibid.*, 144.

84. Cited in, Mpikakhe Dhlamini, “Black Consciousness in Modern SA: The Inferiority Complex (Part 1),” *Rational Standard*, March 21, 2018, <https://rationalstandard.com/black-consciousness-in-modern-sa-the-inferiority-complex-part-1/>

85. Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 4.

86. *Ibid.*

87. Brian Richardson, The Making of a Revolutionary, *International Socialism: Quarterly Journal of the Socialist Workers*, Issue 70, 1996

<http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj70/huey.htm>

88. Derek Hook, *The Mind of Apartheid*, 23.

89. Steve Biko, in *I Write What I Like*, 145.

90. Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 164.

91. Hashi Kenneth Tafira, *Black Nationalist Thought in South Africa*, 5.

92. In 1945, Chief Obafemi Awolowo a Nigerian nationalist, political leader, and a principal participant in the struggle for Nigerian independence penned one of his most influential books, *The Path to Nigerian Freedom*, Faber & Faber, (1966) in which he was highly critical of British policies of indirect colonial administration and called for rapid moves toward self-government and Africanization of administrative posts in Nigeria. He later expanded his critique of the colonial structures of power, especially indicting this system for the conditions of economic, political and social oppression within African states/nations between the late 50s and early 60s. In “The Problems of Africa: The Need for Ideological Reappraisal,” Macmillan Education, (1977) he argued for the need for African states to do all in their power to end to political oppression, economic exploitation and human degradation, which are the essential characteristics of alien/colonial rule. In a similar vein, Leopold Sedar Senghor who was president of the Republic of Senegal from 1960 to 1981, focused his intellectual concerns towards a critique of the so-called superior European civilization which is used as a justification by colonial empires to exploit and pillage the states or nations of Africa. In *Freedom: Negritude and Humanism*, Editions du Seuil, (1964), Senghor engages in a critique of European civilization and offered a moral challenge to its pretension of superiority over the peoples it continues to brutally colonize within Africa and the African diaspora. His obsession with the mapping of the geography of the black race took him, as we know, beyond the more readily acknowledged Diaspora of the Americas and the Caribbean, but to the subcontinent of India, to Papua New Guinea and the South Sea Islands. Kwame Nkrumah, on his own part, was deeply concerned about the unspeakable inhuman nature of European imperialism and colonialism and he made it his life’s mission to battle against its insidious political mechanisms and the self-abrogation of authority that drives this system oppression and exploitation. In *Towards Colonial Freedom*, Heinemann (1962), Nkrumah describes the colonial existence under imperialist conditions as that which necessitates a fierce and constant struggle for emancipation from the yoke of colonialism and

exploitation. He argues that the aim of all colonial governments in Africa and elsewhere should be the struggle for raw materials; and not only this, but the colonies have become a dumping ground, and colonial peoples the false recipients, of manufactured goods of the industrialists and capitalists of Great Britain, France, Belgium and other colonial powers who turn to the dependent territories which feed their industrial plants. This is colonialism in a nutshell. In a bid to overcome colonial rule in Africa, Nkrumah argues for a national solidarity of colonial peoples driven by their determination to end the political and economic power of colonial governments. This also involves the critical analysis of colonial policies, the colonial mode of production and distribution and of imports and exports. This is to serve as a rough blueprint of the processes by which colonial peoples can establish the realization of their complete and unconditional independence. Julius Nyerere, President of Tanzania from 1963 to 1964, is another important scholar who expressed deep anticolonial sentiments during this period. By the late 1960s Tanzania was one of the world's poorest countries. Like many others it was suffering from a severe foreign debt burden, a decrease in foreign aid, and a fall in the price of commodities. Nyerere called for an alternative vision in resolving this problem that does not rely on the West. His solution was based on the collectivization of agriculture which was largely inspired by his philosophy of the family as a unit—Ujamaa—a strategy he described in his *Crusade for Liberation*, Oxford University Press (1978). This helped to build a large-scale movement for nationalization built on indigenous African values. Under this system, people were encouraged to live and work on a co-operative basis in organized villages or *ujamaa* (meaning 'familyhood' in Kiswahili). The idea was to extend traditional values and responsibilities around kinship to function as a socio-political philosophy in Tanzania as a whole. This requires a different kind of thinking from the one previously imposed by the structures of European modernity. This explains why Nyerere argued in *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism*, Oxford University Press (1968), that the first step towards achieving liberation from colonial oppression must be to re-educate the people to regain their former attitude of mind, that is, to rediscover their authentic selves through indigenous values built on the traditional schemes within an African society where individuals draw strength from the community. The second step is to vehemently reject the capitalist attitude of mind which colonialism brought into Africa, and also reject the capitalist methods which go with it. See. Wole Soyinka, "Senghor: Lessons in Power," *Research in African Literatures* 33, no. 4, (Winter 2002):1; Kandioura Dramé, "Introductory Notes," *Callaloo* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 12-13; Kwame, Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, Panaf, 1974; Charles Martin, "Nkrumah's Strategy of Decolonization: Originality and Classicism," *Présence Africaine* 85, no. 1 (1975): xv; Julius Nyerere, *Freedom and Socialism. A Selection from Writings & Speeches, 1965-1967*, Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1968.

93. Ibid., 8.

94. Ibid., 2.

95. Huey P. Newton, *Huey Talks to the Movement* (Boston: New England Free Press, 1968), 7.

96. Ibid., 8

97. David Hilliard and Donald Weise, eds. *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002), 317.

98. Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 4.

99. Ibid.

100. It is important to clarify that the concept of revolutionary suicide does not mean that black revolutionaries like Huey P. Newton are suicidal. What this means is that before we (black revolutionaries) die, we must ask: how shall we live? I say with hope and dignity; and if premature death is the result, it is a product of self-respect rather than cowardice. Newton, in his own words made this clarification thus: “revolutionary suicide does not mean that I and my comrades have a death wish; it means just the opposite. We have such a strong desire to live with hope and human dignity that existence without them is impossible. When reactionary forces crush us, we must move against these forces, even at the risk of death; even though my struggle might have harmed my health, even killed me, I looked upon it as a way of raising consciousness.” Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 5-7.

101. Writing about “Raising Consciousness” of black peoples, especially the recognition of the importance of words to consciousness raising. Huey P. Newton states that the Black Panthers have always emphasized action over rhetoric. But language, the power of the word, in the philosophical sense, is not underestimated in our ideology. We recognize the significance of words in the struggle for liberation, not only in the media and in conversations with people on the block, but in the important area of raising consciousness. Words are another way of defining phenomena, and the definition of any phenomenon is the first step to controlling it or being controlled by it. What this shows is that Huey P. Newton recognizes the power in using spoken words to advance Black Consciousness. He believes that words could be used not only to make Blacks prouder but to make whites question and even reject concepts they had always unthinkingly accepted. One of our prime needs was a new definition for “policeman.” A good descriptive word, one the community would accept and use, would not only advance Black consciousness, but in effect control the police by making them see themselves in a new light. The fundamental thinking here has to do with waging psychological warfare against the oppressor by capturing the mind and clip power of the oppressor; this flips Biko’s remark that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed around thus: the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressed is the minds of both the oppressed and the oppressor. See. Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 163-165.

102. *Ibid.*, 5.

103. Quoted in Donald Wood, *Biko* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1978), xii.

104. Steve Biko, *I write What I Like*, p.6.

105. Tendayi Sithole, p.10.

106. *Ibid.*, 12.

107. In sum, the Panthers combined a unique blend of elements that set them apart from traditional civil rights and minority organizations: a revolutionary ideology that argued for the necessity of fundamental socioeconomic change, a practical series of survival programs that served the community and fostered institutional growth and consciousness, and a willingness to employ creative legal means within the democratic system to achieve their ends. It was these unique elements that made the Panthers popular with many Blacks and, at the same time, a nemesis to the federal government. See. Huey P. Newton, “War Against the Panthers: A Study of Repression in America,” Doctoral Dissertation, UC Santa Cruz, June 1, 1980, 24.

108. Huey P. Newton, “War Against the Panthers,” 17.

109. *Ibid.*, 18.

110. David Hilliard, *The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 3.
111. Hashi Kenneth Tafira, p.15.
112. Stokely Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks: Black Power Back to Pan-Africanism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 42.
113. Ibid., xiv.
114. Ibid., 97.
115. Steve Biko, *I write What I Like*, 68.
116. Hashi Kenneth Tafira, 25.

CHAPTER V

POWER TO THE PEOPLE: HUEY P. NEWTON'S REVOLUTIONARY INTERCOMMUNALISM AS ANTI-IMPERIALIST/ANTICOLONIAL EPISTEMOLOGY

The ideas which can and will sustain our movement for total freedom and dignity of the people cannot be imprisoned, for they are to be found in the people, all the people, wherever they are.¹

~ Huey P. Newton, 1971

Racism and inequality divide us into hateful tribes, robbing us of a better future. When it comes to eradicating racism, all of us can learn from the examples set by the Panthers.

~Stephen Shames, 2016

In the gamut of scholarship that has explored the relevance of the Black Panther Party (BPP) to the Black civil rights movements in the United States from the early 60s to the late 80s, Huey P. (Pierce) Newton is characterized as representing various things, such as a radical revolutionary, a brilliant legal mind, an exceptional philosopher, a debater, a theoretician among many others. However, the genius of Newton, as exemplified by his numerous theoretical formulations that served as a guide for the practice of radical resistance by the Party, as well as his intellectual and practical engagement with the Black community during his lifetime, and his uncompromising stance while dealing with the repressive organ and force of the “imperial state” points to the fact that he is more than any of these characterizations. In other words, to characterize Newton as fitting into any of these single categories is to undermine the prodigy of

one of the greatest Black thinkers that ever lived on the face of the earth. Also, to plug him into such a narrow frame of reference would largely undermine the fluidity and flexibility with which Newton was thinking about his anti-imperialist and anticolonial ideas in real-time.

As the chief ideologue, theoretician, and leader of the Party, he developed critical and analytical systems, from Marxist dialectical materialist systems to grassroots mobilization schemes, and structural critiques to determine the various ways by which the economic and political aspirations of the United States (“imperial state”) aimed at achieving global expansion to fulfill its consumptive capitalist interests necessarily generates conditions of Black repression at home and the exploitation of non-white populations abroad.² The genius of Newton is quite remarkable in this regard because he made his critical ideas adaptive and pertinent to the changing patterns of the forces of repression evolved by the repressive imperial state, against oppressed communities across the world, at particular intervals in the unfolding of history. This capacity for the adaptation of political ideas to changing social realities may have been responsible for the Party’s longevity, particularly his progressive commitment to adapt Black Panther ideology to changing times, especially as these changes pertained to world affairs.³ One can see evidence of this genius in his articulation of how he came about his idea of revolutionary intercommunalism. He recounts thus:

...I woke up one morning with this concept of intercommunalism, and it was like a vision: it didn’t seem as coldly calculated as when you work out a mathematical problem, which is how I usually handle things intellectually. I just woke up one morning and I had solved the contradiction in my sleep. And I was excited to get it out.⁴

In this chapter, I consider Huey P. Newton as a Black political epistemologist whose evolving political ideas about countering hegemonic systems of power revolves around the methodological organization of the Black community into a collective or unified force striving

against the repressive forces of the imperial state. The central concern of a political epistemologist is to investigate knowledge as a phenomenon and consider how this can be applied to politically relevant aspects of human lives. Suppose that one aim of politics should be to bring about just societies and a just world, one question political epistemology will try to answer is the question of how to acquire such objectives. In an attempt to answer such a question, the historical realities that shape human lives have to be looked at with certain subjective principles or epistemic-political formulations that largely drives the tenor of the intervention that will be preferred to deal with the multifarious problems that arise from such situations. This is consistent with how Pietro Omodeo in his work entitled, *Political Epistemology* describes the task of the political epistemologist. He considers the political epistemologist as an individual who displays self-reflexivity and the capacity for conscious deliberation which magnifies the subject in his/her power to freely determine himself/herself under specific historical conditions.⁵

In this sense, one can consider the valuation of subjectivity as a form of expression of humanism which is demonstrated through the deployment of cognitive capacities of the mind and the avowal of political ideas to challenge structural problems in the world. This is the context in which the concept of “Black epistemology,” has been framed in this work, encompassing the political thought systems, accretions, and organizing principles advocated by Black intellectuals/epistemologists which constitutes the basis for social action, especially practical schemes aimed at improving the Black condition in an anti-black, repressive society. While using the history/politics of the BPP and its exploration of anticolonial epistemologies as a foil in a specific historical context, this chapter explores the role of ideas in influencing human behavior and achieving some degree of social transformation. Especially considering the process

of putting into practice the BPP's basic revolutionary principles that are acquired through the rigorous analysis of how the historical and present social conditions impact Black lives, which is a demonstration of knowledge directed at human interests in society. These principles are not only related to the economic and social evils, but they are also caught up in the economic and social evils in this system that oppresses Black people.⁶ It also entails the ideological formations that guide Black social mobilization, the intellectual grounding of constructive human affiliations, as well as the conquest of domineering systems of thought or social arrangement that prevents Black folks from attaining a meaningful existence. This form of political epistemology (Black political epistemology) is understood or characterized differently from how it is characterized in the mainstream discourse of political epistemology.

Political Epistemology: Its Concerns and Limitations

In so far as one of the primary goals of epistemological inquiry is to understand human knowledge as a phenomenon, then this task cannot be pursued oblivious of the social conditions or existential context, both historical and contemporaneous that informs the development of such knowledge attributions or epistemological categories. In this sense, political epistemology, as characterized within the Western "mainstream" philosophical tradition, concerns itself with the multifaceted entanglements of knowledge, political ideas, politics, and other epistemic categories, especially as it relates to power, domination, and survival within the world. It aims to expose the subtleties of institutional frameworks or political-philosophical systems that inform the organization of life as well as the distribution of power within a social whole. In *Political Epistemology*, Pietro Omodeo describes the fundamental features that sum up the discourse of 'political epistemology' in the western tradition, as a form of inquiry which unmistakably points to a discourse connecting knowledge theory with political philosophy.⁷ What Omodeo insinuates

here becomes especially clear when ‘philosophy’ in this context is understood primarily as a reflective activity. This means that political epistemology aims to connect theoretical formulation about the processes and sources of human knowledge with thinking about the fundamental questions of politics, government, justice, freedom, state, and the limits of political authority.

One aim that this hopes to achieve is to disentangle the subtleties of the process of governance for members of the state to achieve participation in the activities that the state deems crucial for its survival and continued entitlement to power and the retention of political authority. For example, political epistemology may be directed at clarifying the role of the electoral college in a democratic electoral system, emphasizing the necessity of its methods, validity, and its complex processes. In this instance, political epistemology may be considered as an inquiry that seeks to offer an understanding of what it means ‘to know’ to know the content of political ideas or concepts and how to distinguish between cases in which certain concepts apply in some particular situation or why they do not in some others. In this sense, political epistemology takes on an informational character because its strategic objective aims at the transference of political knowledge to individuals (epistemological awareness) to encourage them to participate in the process of governance and to have knowledge of the system of politicking for itself.

What is being described here amounts to a culture of trans-generational transference of political ideas to ensure that the state continues to move with the trajectory of history while maintaining its power and political relevance. This centers around the idea of influencing the idea of denizens within the state so that they can go out into the political world and take political actions, whether by voting or becoming congressmen or whatever. Political epistemology would be pointless if ideas cannot be transmitted from one person to another and change the recipients’ views. This explains why much of this aspect of philosophical inquiry focuses on the set of ideas

that are influenced by this sort of cultural transmission; and that such ideas and the cultural sources from which they are derived affect human political behavior as well as other kinds of social behaviors.⁸

In “The Political Epistemology of Judgment,” Albenaz Azmanova describes the function of political epistemology as engaging in public reason about political ideas, ideals, and applicative principles that constitute the norms of social organization within the state. It involves:

engaging in debates about justice and reaching consensus depending not only on what value claims are forwarded or on how well-grounded their justification is, but also on the way in which common reference points (e.g., child famine in Africa, nature as an issue of social justice, animals as bearers of rights) are articulated as relevant issues for public debate.⁹

What Azmanova’s description of political epistemology reveals is its concern with the normative issues of knowledge (political knowledge) since it is assumed that through public debate, people can come to ratify or conceptualize the substantive ideals behind the standards upon which the government conducts the business of the state. In this regard, political epistemology is seen as something that enables the processes of both normative contestation and consensus building in judgment. It strives to maintain a certain structure of the constitution of public reason in which reference points are articulated and mutually related along two axes—both positive and negative orientations of thought. It is believed that this horizontal ordering of reference points actuates the attribution of meaning to any normatively contested political issue. While a vertical ordering of reference points in hierarchies of relevance actuates the attribution of significance to contested norms such as the issues of justice.¹⁰

The focus on public reason about political ideas, would, generate some political disagreements which are something that the discourse of political epistemology in the western tradition concerns itself with. Especially the focus on the nature of political disagreements

whether they are based on objective facts or non-objective knowledge-attributions. It is an attempt to determine whether political disagreement and divergent political behaviors are caused by objective interests and clashes between objective interests. Although the goal from these types of debates is often focused on achieving some form of understanding of the collective interest.¹¹ This is why the attempt to offer a rational explanation for certain political philosophies to justify their application and value for social/human progress is considered crucial. For instance, offering reasons behind the defense of democracy as a political philosophy or as a way of political organization within a state. Those who accept the political philosophy of democracy (epistemic democrats) emphasize the role of knowledge, and even for the concept of truth in their defense of democracy.¹²

Two important limitations can be identified from this characterization of the concerns of political epistemology in the western philosophical tradition. The first one has to do with the over-emphasis on political epistemology as a theoretical field of inquiry that concerns itself with the normative character of political knowledge and the organization of society in such a way that understanding the labyrinth of political ideas or concepts becomes a cardinal objective. However, public debate about political ideas and the apparatus deployed in the state in distributing burdens and benefits may not always yield an understanding of “public” reason. The understanding of “public” may take on different meanings based on the group associations and the meanings affiliated with such terms about the leveraging of power and social, economic, and political benefits within a state. A good example of this is a state like the United States that has formulated or appropriated the term “public” to refer to a space or only particular sections of the population, and where the “poor” have no political party to represent their interests.¹³ In this circumstance, the “public debate” may generate other traits such as the production of a forceful

and legitimate critique of the political ideas or guiding philosophical principles in the state. Especially within a society where, as Toni Morrison notes, “the public interest of minorities, farmers, labor, women, and so on have, infrequently routine political language, become ‘special interests.’”¹⁴ Thus, the characterizations of political epistemology as an overly theoretical enterprise does not take into consideration the social dynamics that operate almost invariably in the epistemology of power to determine what particular form of knowledge is central to human life, both individual or communal and to determine who possess the power to define the operating epistemological categories.

Secondly, there is an unmistakable assumption that political epistemology’s task is to provide an understanding of political concepts and ideas that will create a somewhat horizon of mutual agreement and the suggestion that this would yield participation in the process of governance. This assumption is a product of an uncritical stance of the systems of power that influence the formation of political knowledge as well as the coercive nature of the application of the political ideals that are operable within a state. It is not impossible to imagine that there are always going to be groups of denizens within a state that would not buy into those political epistemological categories due to the legitimate concerns they may have regarding systems of injustice unfair distribution of burdens and benefits within the state. So, the suggestion that those who lack participation in government process or are averse to the political-philosophical categories that are espoused “theoretically” are in such a state, mainly due to lack of understanding, is mistaken. It is a suggestion that is blind to other possibilities such as the fact that individuals/groups could choose not to participate in government not for lack of understanding but because of it. That is, they may come to understand or acquire knowledge that the apparatus of the state including its political epistemologies are all structured and are put in

motion for their destruction. This is the realization that Newton came to in his analysis of the United States as a capitalist exploitative empire—whose propaganda machinery is adept at selling progressive political epistemological categories to the world even though it is the most morally bankrupt, politically corrupt, racially prejudiced and most inhumane (given its long history of dehumanizing (mis)treatment of Blacks) institutionalized political entity. It is this realization that informs Newton’s reformulation of political epistemology.

Newton’s Reformulation of Political Epistemology

Newton’s notion of political epistemology emanates from an acute historical exegesis of the Black condition in the diaspora, as well as the condition of oppressed by the biting pangs of Anglo-American empire’s penchant for capitalist exploitation and socio-political dominance. Given this reality, Newton made it his goal to transform the understanding of political epistemology, especially for Black folks by showing that mere participation in the process of government cannot and should not be the goal for being recognized as a worthy denizen of a state. In other words, Newton considers America’s self-righteous advocacy of democratic political epistemology as deeply problematic when it is considered in the light of the centuries of anti-black racism and the violence of white supremacy that are directed towards Black folks in a land that professes the ideals of freedom, equality, fairness, and justice. In his dissertation, “War Against the Panthers: A Study of Repression in America,” Newton argues that from the point of its founding, democratic government in the United States of America has failed to overcome certain obstacles inherent in both its organization and general political structure which largely prevents its many fundamental assumptions from being actualized. In his view, “two of the most crucial problems which have hindered the development of truly democratic government in America are (i) class and racial cleavages, which have historically been the source of division

and bitter antagonism between sectors of American society, and (ii) the inherent and longstanding distrust held by the American ruling class of any institutionalized democracy involving the mass population.¹⁵ Newton would go on to argue that, indeed the American constitution does not apply to Black lives. In a speech he delivered at the Revolutionary Constitutional Convention in August 1970, Newton stated that one of his goals in organizing the revolution with the people is “to make some contribution to the people’s understanding and the advancement of their consciousness. What [he] wanted to show was that Black people and other minorities in this country have been betrayed by the United States.”¹⁶

He considers this source of division as a mechanism by which the ruling class within the state maintains its power by considering those who choose not to participate in the institutionalized system of government as outliers rather than as important members of the state. This strategy allows the state to silence and beguilingly punish those who may have legitimate grievances or critiques leveled against the state for its failures in actualizing the political aspirations imbued in its political epistemological schemes. This strategy is consequential in two respects. First, it provides the state’s ruling class with a cover to utilize apparatus of violence, brutalization, and death to prevent against the so-called “outliers” which further prevents the participation of those who express dissent on both the theoretical and practical aspects of the state’s political epistemology. Second, it allows the ruling class in the United States to regard those who reject the obvious contradictions between America’s description of itself as a beacon of human rights while committing crimes against humanity as “dangerous” and intellectually inferior. It is such attempts to create this false notion of Black inferiority that allows white supremacy and white hegemony to reign supreme in the United States because when Black folks internalize this false notion, they tend to think of themselves as the problem of their contemptible

circumstances. In “Fear and Doubt,” Newton describes this form of existential crisis that confronts Black lives as a function of the hostile environment (United States) in which they live.

He describes the Black subject as a being that:

...faces a hostile environment and is not sure that it is not his sins that have attracted the hostilities of society. All his life he has been taught (explicitly and implicitly) that he is an inferior approximation of humanity. As a man, he finds himself void of those things that bring respect and a feeling of worthiness. He looks around for something to blame for his situation, but because he is not sophisticated regarding the socio-economic milieu and because of negativistic parental and institutional teachings, he ultimately blames himself.¹⁷

For Newton, the difficult circumstances in which many Black people subsist in the United States do not offer the luxury of a floating theorization or construction of interests as if the state, in truism, attends to the interests of “all” members of denizens within this geopolitical territory.

This is why Newton asserts that when speaking of “interests” of the populace to the United States, Black people constitute an anathema because the only thing that the state constantly tried to institute within Black communities is the idea of the meaninglessness, the psychology of Black inferiority that leads to the disposability of Black lives through austere economic policies and draconian or militarized counter-intelligence/policing strategies. Consequently, the goal of political epistemology understood from a Black perspective (Newtonian), is focused on upending the state and its attendant structures of oppression including the police force and the prison industrial complex (or what Newton refers to as the penal colony). This is why Newton opines in his essay entitled, “In Defense of Self-Defense,” that “Black people in America are the only people who can free the world, loosen the yoke of colonialism, and destroy the war machine. Black people who are within the machine can cause it to malfunction.”¹⁸ It is in a bid to overcome these negative attributions of political knowledge embedded in America’s ideal of democracy, such as the false imagination of Black inferiority

and the state-sanctioned violence against Black folks in the United States that Newton developed a new conception of political epistemology from the Black perspective which he referred to as “Revolutionary Intercommunalism.”

Newton utilized his idea of revolutionary intercommunalism to diagnose symptoms and problems of social and ideological hierarchies built into society and unearthing the positionality of Blackness within such structural formations. He deployed this as a political epistemological framework to begin proffering solutions to the problems that confront the Black community while deploying practical reasoning— politicization of the thinking process towards creating conditions of social transformations for Black folks. Eventually, this produced a praxis of hope in a seemingly hopeless world. In *Revolutionary Suicide*, Newton describes this as the preoccupation of Black men and women who refuse to live under oppression.¹⁹ He insists that the progenitors of such epistemologies of hope (anti-colonial epistemologies) ought to be viewed as dangerous to the white ruling class because they become symbols of hope to their brothers and sisters, inspiring them to follow their example and building alliances aimed at rupturing every structure of anti-black oppression.²⁰ The BPP global alliance didn’t just mean Black/white interactions; it meant working with Chican@s, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and other oppressed groups in the world. If the revolution were to be successful, it needed the participation of all in the creation of a new society.²¹

Newton’s reformulation of political epistemology generally constructs systems of knowledge schemas in the manner that unearths the Black subject, both as a gifted social and political epistemic agent, and as human— capable of proffering solutions to the problems that confront Black people in the world. This is a vision of Black epistemology that centers Blackness in its discussion of how epistemological categories can be deployed to bring about individual and

social transformation. The example of Newton's revolutionary intercommunalism highlights the fact that Black thinkers have created unique ideas and political epistemological categories and thought systems by merely focusing on ways to improve the Black condition. Although Newton was influenced by various intellectual, political and ideological streams, such as existentialism, psychoanalysis, communism, guerilla warfare, Marxism, Fanonian violent militancy, revolutionary thoughts of Malcolm X, and Pan-Africanism, he was clear about the fact that no single ideological position could resolve the complexities and the problems that confront the Black community (or the Black colony within the American empire). Although the violent/militant ideas of Malcolm X and Fanon largely influenced Newton and other leaders of the BPP, they came to consider global white supremacy and the forces of imperialism as the most basic forms of genocidal/violent warfare against oppressed communities across the world. For instance, Newton and Bobby Seale advanced a Black anti-imperialist politics that powerfully challenged the status quo but was difficult to repress due to the grassroots support behind the movement. While drawing on the nationalist ideas of Malcolm X, Newton and Seale declared the Black Panther Party steward of the Black community—its legitimate political representative—standing in revolutionary opposition to the oppressive “power structure.”²²

The dialectical diagnosis upon which Newton develops his analyses of the Black condition within the repressive agenda of the imperial state led him to develop a unique theory of mind that allows him to destroy the borders of knowledge and ruptures the false notion of Black inferiority propelled by the internalization of colonial hegemonic epistemic categories and ideological constructs.

Grasping Reality Radically: Newton's Dialectical Analysis of the Black Mind

The power of imagination to help humans break free of confinement is truly the story of all art

In 1974, Newton penned one of his most influential essays, “The Mind is Flesh,” in which he developed a radical theory of the Black mind through a dialectical analysis of the relation or non-relation between mind and body as prominently discussed in the western philosophical tradition. He began this essay by identifying the fundamental problem with the Cartesian concept of mind, as the dualistic thinking of the mind and body as separate entities—immaterial substance and material body capable of some form of causal relations. It was a view somewhat similar to the separate but equal doctrine albeit, within the parlance of cognitive philosophy or philosophy of mind. For Descartes (and Cartesians), mental state concepts are, for instance, defined regarding experience to which each individual has access only introspectively. Cartesian dualism then refers to the distinction between the mind as an immaterial, nonphysical concept and the brain as a physical, measurable entity as unidentical realities. For instance, in the sixth of his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes explains why the mind cannot be identical to the body:

And, firstly, because I know that all which I clearly and distinctly conceive can be produced by God exactly as I conceive it, it is sufficient that I am able clearly and distinctly to conceive one thing apart from another, in order to be certain that the one is different from the other, seeing they may at least be made to exist separately, by the omnipotence of God; and it matters not by what power this separation is made, in order to be compelled to judge them different; and, therefore, merely because I know with certitude that I exist, and because, in the meantime, I do not observe that aught necessarily belongs to my nature or essence beyond my being a thinking thing, I rightly conclude that my essence consists only in my being a thinking thing or a substance whose whole essence or nature is merely thinking]. And although I may, or rather, as I will shortly say, although I certainly do possess a body with which I am very closely conjoined; nevertheless, because, on the one hand, I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in as far as I am only a thinking and unextended thing, and as, on the other hand, I possess a distinct idea of body, in as far as it is only an extended and unthinking thing, it is

certain that I, that is, my mind, by which I am what I am], is entirely and truly distinct from my body, and may exist without it.”²³

Apart from suggesting that the mind is capable of disembodied existence in the quote above, Descartes also did not offer a satisfactory explanation as to the question of how the mind—an immaterial substance, and the body—a material entity exist could simultaneously exist as corollaries while constructing a holistic view of reality for the being-in-the-world. Newton identifies this as one of the biggest problems of the Cartesian system. This is because the Cartesian theory of mind assumes that a person, as a matter of necessity, could live through two collateral existential histories, one consisting of what happens in and to his body, the other consisting of what happens in and to his mind. Whereas the first could be described as a public experience, the second would be private. The events in the first history are events in the physical world, those in the second are events in the mental world. In this view, it will become customary for a man to express this bifurcation of his two lives (two-ness) and his two worlds by saying that the things and events that belong to the physical world, including his own body, are external, whereas the workings of his mind are internal. For Newton, this constitutes a fundamental problem because it constructs reality as bifurcated and rigid which is inconsistent with the trajectory of history and the social circumstance in which man lives.²⁴

Newton realizes that such Cartesian dualism does not apply to Black subjects because they have historically been relegated to the level of chattel, mere property that can be owned just like any other material object. So, the Cartesian dialectics fails to account for their conditions of being in the world. Since within the matrix of colonial logics and epistemological categories and dialectic, Black folks could merely function as mere bodies or material entities without any attribution of phenomenological traits of the mind. This explains why Newton insists that this dialectic had to be ruptured to evolve a new dialectic or theory of mind that will account for the

being of Black folks in the world. Both materially and phenomenological existence—beingness or being-in-the-world. Thus, “the mind is flesh”—becomes—a radical philosophy of the Black mind as not merely possessing a phenomenological character but the embodiment of material reality and existence of the Black subject/being in a temporal and everchanging world.

In a striking section in *Revolutionary Suicide*, where Newton was discussing the mistreatment of Blacks under the American penal system, he made it clear that using standards of judgment and structures of experience designed specifically for white/European subjects to measure the *beingness* or agency of Black subjects would merely help to achieve nothing but reinforce the false thesis of Black inferiority. He thinks of such moves as routinely used weapons against Black people in particular and minority groups and poor people generally to justify the prejudice that they are inferior and unintelligent.²⁵

This is why Newton believes we need a different theory of mind that will account for the reality of the Black experience. This dialectic that informs this position aims to break down all borders and divisions of being because Newton fundamentally considers man being at one with nature since the mind is materialized or realized in flesh in a spatial-temporal world. As Newton puts it, “only through the medium of the public physical world can the mind of one person make a difference to the mind of another.”²⁶ This implies that he was interested in emphasizing the ego-body affiliation that was de-emphasized in Cartesian dialectics as that which exists in a shared temporal space—this is what informs his idea of intercommunalism. To put it succinctly, Newton does not see the mind and body as separate entities as attempts to answer the following critical question in “The Mind is Flesh:”

What are the parameters of the discussion of the mind? Dialectics argues a spatial reference (intercommunalism), the plasticity of the ego: the racial potential to overcome alienation at all orders of abstraction. Temporarily, we argue the

historical materialism of the species: that the mind-brain-body evolved in tandem, coeval and concomitant.²⁷

Newton believes that social reality largely shapes the content (phenomena) and object of the mind just as the mind and body conjunctively function to shape social reality; this is why he sees change as a complex process that occurs at the psychological, sociological, historical, epistemological, economic, phenomenological and material levels.

This is the architecture of the dialectical notion of the mind that undergirds Newton's political epistemology which primarily focuses on the condition of Black folks in the world. What he is imagining with this, is a new social order that requires a new order of thinking and a new way of seeing the world. Newton's emphasis on man's involvement in the process of social change stems from his realization that social reality is characteristically mutable so the envisioning of the strategies for Black liberation has to reflect this reality. It has nothing to do with the inflexible systems of dualism between mind and body in the western philosophical tradition that does not show how man actively changes the nature of reality through the functional control of thoughts, ideas, and knowledge. So, Newton insists that to transcend this limited understanding of the subject-object affect in the world, an attempt must be made to find the balance, the dialectic, and analytic relationships, between various orders of abstraction inherent in the mind-brain-body process. The operative word is the process and it is the dynamic of the process that distinguishes dialectical from traditional methods of analysis.²⁸ The dialectical analysis that Newton offers is focused towards diagnosing man as a being at one with nature—a complex being (thereby rupturing all borders of knowledge/being such as mind-body, gender binaries, nature-technology distinctions, etc.) and this is how he believes that we can move past the false categories of alterity created by the colonial logics of existence. As Newton argues in

“Eve, the Mother of All Living,” it is *human* liberation that makes a dialectic with every suffering member of the mass of humankind.²⁹

This theory of mind constructed by Newton is very crucial for the formulation of his political epistemology—revolutionary intercommunalism—as an anticolonial epistemology. First, Newton observes that men by their very nature are deracinated, denatured, uprooted forever, their souls floating and blown about in the endless wind of history, and any “cure” that cannot minister to this irremediable hurt is nothing more than a straw in that wind.³⁰ In other words, any revolutionary epistemological system that is worth its salt must be able to address the socio-historical problems that confront man as a being in the world rather than amassing theoretical formulations for the sake of it. An example of this is the great deal made of the distinctions between personal and race memory as functions of the mind-brain (to which we will add “body”). The terrible anxiety concerning survival in the twentieth century has focused the genius of science, philosophy, and literature on the mind, or the brain, of humankind.³¹ But this alone does not help to alleviate the socio-historical problems that man (specifically Blacks and other minoritized populations) is confronted within the quest to achieve certain existential possibilities. Newton was particularly interested in transforming our understanding of the mind as “embodiment” of reality that transcends the bifurcated categories of mind and body—it is an acknowledgment of a kind of phenomenological presence entangled with the materiality of history which makes it possible for Black subjects to negotiate the conditions of their being-in-the-world as unique even if entangled with endemic white supremacist evil.

To arrive at his notion of intercommunalism, Newton develops a revolutionary dialectical view of the flesh (as mind) because he considers the hidden agenda or yearning and gratification of the flesh is bound to be represented by images, by the feelings of nostalgia, and finally by

rebellion. This rebellion, at the deepest level, is the existential revolutionary's field of inquiry.³² It is a new form of inquiry that subjects previous political epistemological systems to thorough criticisms and a mechanism to usher in a new way of life that adamantly refuses to accept oppressive socio-political structures as the norm. In this regard:

It is, then the task of dialectical materialism to invoke the entire human body in a complete social-historical context whenever the concepts "mind" or "brain" are brought to play in the dialogue of alienation that modern science has become. Our field is real life where each arbitrary order of abstraction (mind-brain-body) is always a function of human flesh and blood.³³

When Newton opines that "our field is real life," he is referring to an epistemological scheme that engages with the materiality of human existence as a unified rather than a demarcated structure of reality or nature. In "Dialectics of Nature," he describes the anticolonial struggle as that which encompasses geo-spatial territories because the mind-body dualism has been ruptured and, in its place, we now have a more unifying view of nature and man within nature. Thus, Newton founded his idea of intercommunalism on "the basic concept of the unity of nature underlying and transcending all arbitrary national and geographic divisions. Western science [and philosophy], of course, confirms this obvious concept at the same time as it slaves away in the service of reactionary intercommunalism."³⁴

This explains why Newton criticizes what he regards as "reactionary intercommunalism" which is constructed on the imperialistic exploitation of subordinated groups by the Anglo-American empire. However, the cunning of reactionary intercommunalism consists in its perception of the interrelationship of all-natural phenomena, including all human beings, and seizes upon this phenomena in an attempt to distort the balance in its favor.³⁵ As a radical-revolutionary strategy, Newton advocates revolutionary intercommunalism as a mechanism for remedying the collapse of the dialectic of nature driven by the greed of the Anglo-American

empire. According to Newton, “revolutionary intercommunalism argues that the rising expectations of the Human Rights revolution in the exploited world will violently disrupt the reactionary distortion of the chain of nature in its favor.”³⁶ It is this disruption that Newton aims to achieve with the development of his anti-colonial epistemology (revolutionary intercommunalism), whose frame of reference pays attention to the historical antecedent social movements towards the projection of a framework of political epistemology that can improve the conditions of people within the Black community. Ultimately, his goal was to develop his unique insights on the specific system of ideas that he thought would be necessary to liberate Black folks from the conditions imposed upon them by the repressive imperial/colonial state. It is this synthesis of ideas that coalesced into what he eventually characterized as revolutionary intercommunalism.

Revolutionary Intercommunalism: The Epicenter of Newton’s Political Epistemology

Revolutionary intercommunalism is one of the most important aspects of Newton’s political epistemology. This becomes apparent when one notes that this notion captures the most advanced stage of the formation of his political epistemology. In the way, Newton conceived revolutionary intercommunalism as a philosophical stream of thought that maintains a progressive orientation about how Black subjects both in the United States and across the world, should be viewed based on shared group-affiliations as a common epistemological denominator of social power, about knowledge dissemination and the utilization of radical ideas to challenge the structures of power that ensures white dominance in the global sphere. For instance, in his essay, “Dialectics of Nature,” Newton describes revolutionary intercommunalism as “founded on the basic concept of the unity of nature underlying and transcending all arbitrary national and geographic divisions.”³⁷ In other words, revolutionary intercommunalism upholds an

epistemological vision of the world order as de-constructed, de-structuralized, and imagined from the place of subjugation. It is an imagination that unsettles the colonial hegemonic ways imperialist powers have constructed non-white peoples of the world as subjects within “colonies” for achieving their economic, social and political objectives at the expense of the lives of those subsisting within such colonies. Within imperialist structures and psychology of colonial domination, peoples subsisting under “colonies” are not regarded as capable of exhibiting the capacity for independent thought, which makes it impossible to imagine ways by which such colonies could ever find common grounds to form anti-imperial and anticolonial alliances.

In “Colonial Modernities: A view from the Imperial Verandah, c. 1880-1960,” Jan-Georg Deutsch opines that part of the global construction of the axis of colonial forms of power including jurisprudential and administrative practices requires the construction of the idea of the geographically-demarcated and handicapped ‘other.’³⁸ In other words, the subjugated communities characterized as colonies in places like Africa, Asia, Latin America, and in the United States are constructed as modernity’s ‘other.’ This is why Newton considers his notion of revolutionary intercommunalism to begin with a de-structuralized construction of the global sphere—rescuing it from the imperialist ideological and geospatial constructions. In *Revolutionary Intercommunalism & the Right of Nations to Self-Determination* Newton, argues that:

If colonies cannot decolonize and return to their original existence as nations, then nations no longer exist. Nor, we believe, will they ever exist again. And since there must be nations for revolutionary nationalism or internationalism to make sense, we decided that we would have to call ourselves something new. We say that the world today is a dispersed collection of communities. A community is different from a nation. A community is a small unit with a comprehensive collection of institutions that exist to serve a small group of people. And we say further that the struggle in the world today is between the small circle that administers and profits from the empire of the United States and the peoples of the world who want to determine their destinies.³⁹

Here, Newton is highlighting the historical significance of the oppression of Blacks in the United States in the 60s and how this was largely related to the conditions imposed on other oppressed people of the world. As Akinwale Umoja affirms in “Repression Breeds Resistance,” the destructuralized approach that Newton takes in understanding the global oppressed community is at the heart of his revolutionary thought.

The essence of his theory was that imperialism had reached a degree that sovereign borders were no longer recognized, and the oppressed nations no longer existed, only oppressed communities of the world.⁴⁰ In his view, there are merely differences in degree between what is happening to Blacks in the United States and what is happening to all other oppressed people in the world, including Africans. Their needs are the same and their energies are the same. Also, the contradictions they suffer will only be resolved when the people can establish a revolutionary intercommunalism where they share all the wealth that they produce and live in one world.⁴¹ For many Panthers, revolutionary internationalism meant the option of refuge from the repressive apparatus of the imperial state. But revolutionary intercommunalism was more than securing a haven. This ideological stance meant supporting liberation movements in their struggle against the US imperialists.⁴² Newton’s emphasis on global alliances between oppressed communities across the world (based on a de-structuralized conception of the nature of reality) through his idea of revolutionary intercommunalism, is an affront to an empire such as the United States that seeks to consolidate its power through divide-and-conquer tactics; it is also a testament to Black intellectual the strengths that could be generated to fight against colonial hegemony when Black political epistemologies are fashioned through a united front.

In “War Against the Panthers,” Newton speaks of these contradictions as the very reason why the struggle against imperialism and colonial-capitalist exploitation began in the first place.

He writes thus:

The ultimate form of struggle [was] born of this contrived contradiction, a contradiction which is as old as the life of the American republic itself. The contradiction which provides much of the source material for [Black resistance] would doubtless have never existed nor reached such dastardly and volatile proportions if it were not for the societal wide ingestion of a class—and racially-biased social philosophy, which stemmed from the original premise of American social organization, a deeply ingrained belief that society [is] by nature divided into superior and inferior classes and races of people. This vision of the “natural order” of society, rationalized by those who have a vested interest in its maintenance, has kept Americans of different classes and races either directly engaged in social warfare, or forever poised in a position of battle.⁴³

At this point in the development of his political epistemology, Newton had begun to depart from his earliest framing of the revolutionary politics of the BPP in Black nationalist terms. His nationalist stance was focused on the development of a political epistemological system that is focused on improving the condition of Black folks living within the American colony (internal colonialism). As he moves towards the revolutionary intercommunalist phase, Newton became aware of the oddity of imagining a nationalist framework of revolution without ownership of a clearly defined physical or geographical space—a nation. At this point, he realized the global nature of capitalist exploitation/greed and the systems of oppression that sustains the racial, economic, political, and social dominance upheld by Anglo-American empires. Especially how these colonial/hegemonic empires oppress communities of color across the globe.

Newton utilized his idea of revolutionary intercommunalism to expose the illogic and moral bankruptcy of colonial and imperialist exploitation embarked upon by European states and the United States in the global sphere. One of the dominant traits of political mobilization in the

twentieth century among industrialized European nations and the United States is the adoption of the colonial model of nation-state building—which apart from constructing highly insulated territorial systems of demarcating national interests, encapsulated the desires to create homogenous ‘national culture based on particular markers of codification and belongingness, such as language, racial and ethnic affiliations, including other salient features or categories that are considered as vital for determining those who are considered as insiders and those considered as outsiders.⁴⁴ One salient category that was utilized to make such demarcations or distinctions possible is the category of the *human*. Racial/ethnic affiliations became crucial in determining who qualifies to be named *human* in relation to whether one belongs to the dominant group or the sub-dominant group. In this instance, the appellation, “national interests,” becomes what categories the dominant group projects as salient. So, these imperial states continue to seek exploitative/capitalist expansion within and beyond their border’s framework in an unrestricted fashion, while at the same time espousing nationalist ideologies in highly narrow terms to exclude members adjudged to be part of sub-dominant communities (outgroups).

This categorical distinctions between dominant and sub-dominant groups, Newton argues, was how a state/empire like the United States was able to develop highly sophisticated machinery of exploitation and capitalist wealth system that condemns Black folks to the social condition of the underclass. In this regard, Blacks in America cannot participate in the so-called “national interest” of the imperial state. Rather, Blacks, especially Black revolutionaries are considered as posing threats to the “national security” of the state, for demanding that Black lives matter in the race of trenchant antiblack oppression. For Newton, oppressed communities need to form a global alliance—a global community of reformed/radical subjects—to have the clout to

be able to free themselves from both the psychological and physical shackles of imperial exploitation. As he affirms:

We saw that it was not only beneficial for us to be revolutionary nationalists but to express our solidarity with those friends who suffered many of the same kind of pressures we suffered. Therefore, we changed our self-definitions. We said that we are not only revolutionary nationalists—that is nationalists who want revolutionary changes in everything, including the economic system the oppressor inflicts upon us—but we are also individuals deeply concerned with the other people of the world and their desires for revolution. To show this solidarity, we decided to call ourselves internationalists.⁴⁵

Newton's emphasis on forging deep connections with other oppressed people of the world is based on his conviction that due to the imperial state's historical accumulation of power and political influence in the global polity, regional mobilizations alone would not suffice to engage with it. This represents an important pillar of Newton's notion of revolutionary intercommunalism.

He proceeded from this position to argue that revolutionary intercommunalism should be conceived as a world culture to be actualized through the revolutionary politics of oppressed peoples across the world. It is a revolutionary politics that is driven by the radical epistemological goal of transposing Black subjects into the realm of the human within; that is, it challenges the hegemonic concept of the human as deficient because Black subjects are not recognized as epistemically viable subjects. In this light, Newton considered the development of revolutionary intercommunalism as a world culture must begin with the realization that the material conditions exist that would allow the people of the world to develop a culture that is essentially human—negating all forms of ascriptions that undermine this reality while nurturing those things that would allow the people to resolve contradictions in a way that would not cause their mutual slaughter. The development of such a culture would be revolutionary intercommunalism.⁴⁶ Elaine Brown, one of the leaders of the BPP, describes Newton's

philosophy of ‘intercommunalism,’ as one of the earliest recorded premonitions of present-day ‘globalism,’ which became the guiding intellectual current of the Party, infusing the Panthers with a global perspective that flew in the face of nationalism.⁴⁷

It is pertinent to note that Newton’s development of revolutionary intercommunalism as a political epistemology went through different stages of metamorphosis. In this sense, one might consider Newton as a process philosopher who was deeply interested in the epistemology of change as well as changing epistemologies to suit social realities. For him, political epistemology should be considered as a phenomenon that is always in a perpetual state of flux—always changing. As he asserts:

The struggle of mutually exclusive opposing tendencies within everything that exists explains the observable fact that all things have motion and are in a constant state of transformation. Things transform themselves because while one tendency or force is more dominating than another, change is nonetheless a constant, and at some point, the balance will alter and there will be a new qualitative development. New properties will come into existence, qualities that did not altogether exist before.⁴⁸

This concretizes Newton’s thinking that socio-political ideas should be made consistent with the changing nature of reality. He may have arrived at this diagnosis from his in-depth study of the dialectical material analysis of history in the works of Marx and Lenin, especially the emphasis on the conflict of social forces in the movement of history. Although he differs from Marx on the perspective of analysis of dialectical materialism concerning the “present” struggles of the people. He thought that Marx’s dialectical historical materialism specifically utilized the past conditions of working-class Europeans and used that to develop a theory of capitalist and class-based exploitation.

Newton did not think that this should be the proper approach to combating the forces of capitalist exploitation. For him, the “present” should be the groundwork for understanding the

unforeseen ways by which the imperial state reinvents itself and expands its consumptive appetite to exploit globally oppressed communities. So, this necessitated a broader vision of resistance than mere class-to-class analysis of the nature of the existential struggle faced by oppressed people in the world. Thus, in his role as the BPP's foremost philosopher, he took the Party through ideological metamorphoses, experimenting, and wrestling with many theories aimed at finding solutions to problems such as poverty, racism, classism, and sexism. Openness to change was a characteristic that enabled Newton to redefine and reevaluate conditions and situations continually.⁴⁹ This is evident in terms of how he continued to revamp the Party's ideological and epistemological positions at different periods in the life of the Party.⁵⁰ Through their community survival programs, the Panthers laid the foundation for self-actualization (providing Black subjects with the motivation to recognize their full capabilities). Internally, the Panthers also reached higher levels of awareness as their ideology advanced across four stages: Black nationalism (1966-1968), revolutionary socialism (1969-1970), internationalism (1970-1971), and finally, intercommunalism (1971-when the Party ceased operations in 1982).⁵¹

The development of the Panther's revolutionary ideology is a testament to their ability to adapt and grow with the changing political landscape within the United States and throughout the world. As Newton notes in *Revolutionary Suicide*, "revolution is not an action; it is a process. Times change and policies of the past are not necessarily effective in the present. Our military strategies were not frozen. As conditions changed, so did our tactics."⁵² What Newton communicates here is the philosophy of change at the heart of his political epistemology; always subjecting the socio-political epistemes developed to guide the Party and the movement in ways that would allow it to stay relevant to the needs of the Black community in the United States while also taking into consideration, the interests of oppressed peoples in the global community.

Having such a disposition towards changing philosophies, made it possible for Newton to rework his ideas in real-time to determine the areas of strengths and areas of weaknesses that require further work. He was able to determine the effectiveness of any particular political epistemology based on the extent to which it contributes to changing the nature of social reality. For instance, in describing the move from Black nationalism to revolutionary nationalism, Newton talked about how rigorous analysis was a crucial part of this process, especially determining how oppressed communities in the world can transform themselves into a dominant force that has the clout to confront the dehumanizing practices of the imperial state. This view was founded on the influence that is derivable from a great number of people forming coalitions against organized systems of exploitation which is why the Black Panther Party developed their political epistemologies from just a plain nationalist orientation or separatist nationalist into revolutionary nationalist orientation. They held that social mobilization against the forces of imperialism and colonialism must be a product of an alliance with all of the other people in the world struggling for decolonization and nationhood, who called themselves a “dispersed colony” because they did not have the geographical concentration that the other so-called colonies had.⁵³

I am We: Collective Epistemology as the Foundation of Newton’s Revolutionary Intercommunalism

In *Revolutionary Suicide*, Newton articulates the collective epistemological framework that is at the heart of his anticolonial/anti-imperialist epistemological system known as revolutionary intercommunalism. He draws this from the African philosophy of collectivism that emphasizes the power of social association towards achieving existential goals. As he writes; “there is an old African saying, ‘I am we.’ If you met an African in ancient times and asked him who he was, he would reply, ‘I am we.’ This is revolutionary suicide: I, we, all of us are the one and the multitude.”⁵⁴ What is of philosophical interest to Newton from this African aphorism, is

the idea of the strength in Black collectivism. He then projected this as the paramount ideal that undergirds revolutionary intercommunalism as a collective epistemology. Here we see an affirmation of group solidarity and group pride as important matrices for building coalitions that could generate enough political strength to combat the imperial and colonial exploitation of the imperial state. In other words, when oppressed communities across the world organize to form social coalitions, as Newton imagined, they come to form a united front for social change. That unity in itself becomes a fundamental source of power—the power of the multitude—directed towards breaking the material and ideological chains that hold them bound. From this standpoint, the BPP engages not just with the materiality of racialized Black oppression in the United States but also the plight of oppressed communities across the world suffering under the weight of global white supremacy. The Party insisted that an understanding of the geographies of white supremacy requires an understanding of how white supremacy organizes itself across space through time. It is also to understand racialization and the process through which abstract notions of difference and sub-alterity are made material in various oppressed communities across the world.⁵⁵

When the BPP was formed in 1966, it held a vision of racialized and socialized progress that was grounded on the idea of community. The original vision of the Party was to develop a lifeline to the people within the community, by serving their needs and defending them against their oppressors, from the armed police force to capitalist exploiters. They knew that this strategy would raise the consciousness of the people and also give them their support.⁵⁶ As Newton himself articulates, “the primary concern of the Black Panther Party is to lift the level of consciousness of the people through theory and practice to the point where they will see exactly what is controlling them and what is oppressing them, and therefore see exactly what has to be

done.”⁵⁷ This assertion shows that Newton understood that for any revolutionary system to be successful, it must begin by changing the thinking of the oppressed people through the raising of their consciousness to enable them to ascertain the conditions and sources of their oppression. This is why Newton maintained that the BPP served as the vanguard in helping the people bring about intercommunalism.

As he saw it, part of the role of the Party was to expose imperialist antagonisms, contradictions, and motives and to raise the people’s consciousness in a way that would compel them to undertake revolutionary social action.⁵⁸ For Newton, all oppressed people within the bounds of the American empire are in some sense colonized. This is what A. J. Williams-Myers in *Destructive Impulses* describes as the consequence of “the African American intrusion (socioeconomic and political) into the community of whiteness.”⁵⁹ This is similar to Kenneth B. Clark’s observation in *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power* that the colonization, oppression, and economic control of Blacks constituted a source of power for many white people, including enabling those who would otherwise occupy a low status to see themselves as middle class.⁶⁰ However, Newton sees this position of “underclass” as a source of power. He held that because Black people in America compose a uniquely colonized community, comparable to colonized communities in other parts of the world while simultaneously located within the very center of the empire, the community is in a uniquely privileged position to destroy that empire. Specifically, Newton considered Black people in the U.S. to be in the ideal position to act as the vanguard for a global revolution against what he regarded as reactionary intercommunalism.⁶¹

In the early 70s, a period where many groups were agitating for expanded political rights, and the invasion of oppressed communities in Indochina by the United States, including its exploitative forage into emerging-independent nations in Africa, the Panthers began to reimagine

or reevaluate their ideological positions in the light of the materiality of the activities of empire within oppressed communities. Also, Newton's shaping of his ideas of revolutionary intercommunalism to embrace a collectivist epistemology was influenced by some of his experiences in his self-imposed exile to Cuba in the mid-70s. As he articulates:

[In Cuba] they are interested in their fields, and international politics. You get this singleness of purpose, from the university to the cane fields. You get the feeling you are a member of a collective, the whole country's collective, and you are working to make life better.⁶²

The Panthers saw Cuba as a shining example of how revolutionary guerilla action could be led in a bid to achieve a more equitable society. They hoped that the Cuban government would allow them to establish an international base in Cuba and would help train them to bring about a revolution in the United States.⁶³ These historical realities led the Panthers and other revolutionary nationalists, to focus on resolving the tension regarding how to effectively locate Black nationalism in an international context and reconcile it with larger goals of "Third World" anticolonialism and worldwide socialist revolution. Part of the BPP leader's response to this dilemma was to create what Eldridge Cleaver dubbed "embryonic sovereignty" through the Party's anticolonial vernacular, one that symbolically located Black people as part of a global anticolonial majority while acknowledging their unique position within the United States.⁶⁴ The concept of "embryonic sovereignty" was used to expose the functional axes of internal and external dynamics of colonialism, neocolonialism, and imperialism. Such that an internal state of affairs was generated to uphold antagonistic principles and practical politics to implode the oppressive structures of empire from within.

What Newton found interesting in the concept of collective epistemology both at the theoretical and practical levels includes the idea that social truths about the Black condition in the United States as well as those of other subordinated groups across the world are shared as a

common attitude, generated as a result of the colonial situation. It emphasizes the crafting of ideologies of anticolonial coalition such that this becomes a cognitive disposition or attitudes that are transferred from the individual agents within the oppressive social context to a broad spectrum of individuals that makes up the social group. It is an emphasis on the social and political roles of knowledge acquisition, dissemination, and deployment in such a manner that it constitutes the very basis for negotiating terms of freedom or liberation from oppressive systems of the imperial state. In this instance, group knowledge, is understood in this context as a source of socially located power—an aggregation of the extrinsically attributable qualities of mind shared as a uniting force for social mobilization and social understanding.⁶⁵ So, it is an ascription of the summative or binding philosophies that forms what can be regarded as the cognitive states to groups and how this constitutes the basis of joint commitment or collective aspirations towards achieving social transformation. In other words, collective epistemology, as embedded in Newton's idea of revolutionary intercommunalism, focuses on how group-based epistemological categories can be developed into alternatives to an oppressive socio-political order to transcend the experiencing of domination and subjugation within that order.

This was a central concern within Newton's political epistemology. This collectivism also includes the sharing of the positive and negative consequences that are derived from the struggle against imperialist exploitation. In *Blood in my Eye*, George Jackson emphasizes similar sentiments of collective epistemology, when he avows that for one to develop revolutionary consciousness, one must learn how revolutionary consciousness can be raised to the highest point by stimuli from the vanguard elements. It has to involve the recognition and appreciation that the decades of hard, sometimes dangerous work done in the name of revolution by the older socialist parties and oppressed groups within subjugated "colonies."⁶⁶ This is what he referred to as the

“unitarian vision of the progressive movement.” He believes that this “unitary vision” must encompass the “search” for those elements in our present situation which can become the basis for joint action.”⁶⁷

From the analysis of the material conditions of Blacks in the United States and those of oppressed communities within the global polity, Newton divined that because the imperial state (empire) continues to transform itself into a power controlling the lands and political destinies of all lands and peoples, especially those of oppressed communities, there is need for Black revolutionaries to form political, epistemological and revolutionary alliances with other militant revolutionaries across geospatial landscapes. Worthy of note here is the BPP’s alliance with the Pan-Africanist movements in Africa.⁶⁸ In this instance, what was of particular interest to Newton was the politico-military model of counter-revolutionary warfare designed and led by Kwame Nkrumah. In his *Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare* Nkrumah situates the struggles of Black people against the forces of colonial and imperialist oppression in the context of the global Black struggle against oppression. For instance, Nkrumah conceives of the Black Power movement, the militant revolutionary politics of the BPP in the United States, and the struggles of peoples of African descent in the Caribbean, South America, and elsewhere, as constituting an integral part of the African politico-military revolutionary struggle.⁶⁹ As Nkrumah writes:

the true dimension of our [the Pan-Africanist] struggle...is to pave the way for national reconstruction and to promote prosperity for the broad masses through an All-African struggle against colonialism and all the new manifestations of imperialism.⁷⁰

Pan-Africanism, as conceived by Nkrumah, was based on the age-old aspiration towards the unity of all peoples of African origin exploited as workers and as a race which explains why any kind of victory attained in the process of this struggle must be viewed as a victory of all the revolutionary, oppressed and exploited masses of the world who are challenging the capitalist,

imperialist and neo-colonialist power structure of reaction and counter-revolution.⁷¹ Nkrumah was very clear that the ultimate revolution that would destroy western imperialism has to be violent/militaristic in its approach—the need for a militarized Pan-African organization. In his view:

in comparison, the Independent States of Africa are at present military weak. Unlike the imperialists and neo-colonialists, they have no mutual defense system and no unified command to plan and direct joint action. But this will be remedied with the formation of the All-African People's Revolutionary Army and the setting up of organizations to extend and plan effective revolutionary warfare on a continental scale. We possess the vital ingredient necessary to win—the full enthusiastic support of the broad masses of the African people [including Africans in diaspora] who are determined once and for all to end all forms of foreign exploitation, to manage their affairs, and to determine their own future. Against such overwhelming strength organized on a Pan-African basis, no amount of enemy forces can hope to succeed.⁷²

There is a form of epistemological independence that is generated in this image of revolutionary warfare. It is that which isolates the politically meaningful social reality from those that are extraverted. In other words, as a way of making peoples within the exploited colonies buy into the revolutionary philosophies of warfare, there has to be an epistemological “acceptance” of the principles of engagement that would constitute the basis of group-based solidarity.

Newton thought highly of the revolutionary Pan-Africanist ideas of Nkrumah. In his essay “On Pan-Africanism or Communism” written in 1972, he said this about Nkrumah's Pan-Africanist ideas:

The brilliant Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, having identified and warned his people of the deviant dangers in neocolonialism, called for a united Africa. The unity that Dr. Nkrumah called for carried the demand of solidarity based upon certain principles: specifically, pooling resources from all separate countries of Africa into an all-African treasury...⁷³

This assertion by Newton was made at a time when he discovered that the global activities of the imperial state, through external and internal colonization efforts, have necessitated the formation

of a global alliance to expose the real intentions of the agents of this oppressive systems as well as eschew all political, social, economic and military bases which serve as a springboard for perpetuating the parasitic elements of the ideologies and praxis of empire within subjugated communities. The Party looked to liberation struggles and revolutions around the world as inspiration and guidance for the Revolution that would one day emerge in the heart of the United States. All around the world, people were fighting for their freedom from foreign, usually colonial, domination. Africa, Asia, and Latin America were ablaze with the fiery light of rebellion.⁷⁴ This reality was exploited by Newton and the Panthers to make a call to the oppressed people of the world as a disparate collection of communities under siege. This call entailed the realization and affirmation of the fact that oppressed communities exist, nations are usurped, especially imperial nation-states. In this vein, communities, by the way of definition, are a comprehensive collection of institutions that are supposed to serve the people. This is how the oppressed people of the world liberate their communities and through the redistribution of wealth and the pursuit of happiness.⁷⁵ It is no wonder then that “Power to the People,” eventually became the slogan of the Black Panther Party.

As much as Newton praised Nkrumah’s brilliance for coming up with this philosophical or political epistemological revolutionary programs that are extremely critical of the antics and politics of empire, he thinks that they are limited in application, especially when their tenets are considered in place of the conditions of Blacks in the United States. At the heart of Newton’s critique of Pan-Africanism, is the emphasis that its progenitors and advocates placed on the historicization of the global Black experience as a monolithic which is opposed to the philosophy of change that undergirds Newton’s political epistemology, especially his emphasis on the principles of social contradictions that led to his formulation of revolutionary intercommunalism.

Newton is more of the persuasion that historical realities and social trajectories may necessitate different instances of engagement and approaches to militaristic counter-revolution. Even though a global Black alliance can be formed, in principle, towards combatting the forces of colonial/imperialist oppression. For Newton, the idea of Pan-Africanism is complicated by the limitations and complexities tied around the idea of creating a separate state for Black folks in the United States. As he inquires, “what does “Pan-Africanism” mean to those Black Africans who did not live Nkrumah’s dream, but lived in the real nightmare of U.S. economic/military might?”⁷⁶ What Newton is articulating here is the fact that the geospatial limitations of Pan-Africanism do not make it specifically apropos in addressing the conditions of oppression of Black folks in the United States. Newton would further advance his critique of Pan-Africanism to encompass his views on human culture, such that he imagines Pan-Africanism as upholding a monolithic view of African culture as a historically material immutable fact. Newton eventually submitted that Pan-Africanism was the highest expression of reactionary cultural nationalism.⁷⁷

In his view:

Cultural nationalism deals with a return to the old culture of Africa and that we are somewhat freed by identifying and returning to this culture, to the African cultural stage of the 1100s or earlier. Somehow, they believe that they will be freed through identifying in this manner. As far as we are concerned, we believe that it’s important for us to recognize our origins and identify with the revolutionary Black people of African and people of color throughout the world. But as far as returning, per se to the ancient customs, we don’t see any necessity in this. And also, we say that the only culture that is worth holding is revolutionary—for change for the better.⁷⁸

His critique of the nationalistic threshold that forms the basis of Pan-Africanism coincided with his appraisal of Black nationalism as a restricting framework for advocating revolutionary counter-resistance. For Newton, careful consideration of the condition of Blacks in the United States would reveal that they are only tied historically to Africa, which makes it impossible for

them to lay any real claim to territory in the United States of Africa. Black Americans have only the cultural and social customs that have evolved from centuries of oppression. In other words, Blacks in the United States form not a subjugated colony but an oppressed community inside the larger boundaries. What, then, do the words “Black nationalism” concretely mean to the U.S. Black? Not forming anything resembling a nation presently, shall U.S. blacks somehow seize (or possibly be “given”) U.S. land and expect to claim sovereignty as a nation?⁷⁹

In the mid-70s, when the Panthers were seeking to counter the multiple avenues of state violence against the leaders of the Party, through imprisonment on trumped-up charges, clandestine “intelligence” or reactionary machinations of the FBI’s COINTELPRO program, Newton began to broaden his vision of the political epistemological apparatus that should guide the Party’s activities both locally and internally. He was more interested in building principles of alliances and social mobilization that looked beyond the analysis of historical material conditions towards a system of organizing that embraces the possibilities of present associations for building a liberating future. He was more interested in advancing a political epistemological framework that would bring oppressed people together within the global sphere as an ultimate source of strength. As he opines, “if however, we are speaking of eliminating exploitation and oppression, then the oppressed must begin with a united, worldwide thrust along the lines of oppressed versus oppressor.”⁸⁰ This is the thrust of his revolutionary intercommunalist ideas. Intercommunalism grew out of Panthers’ fundamental ideological position on internationalism—that the United States is not a nation but an empire that dominated and exploited the world and through this process, had transformed other nations into oppressed communities.⁸¹ In the initial stages, the Panthers called themselves, then, revolutionary nationalists. But after that they realized that the politics of nation-states include genocidal violence and wars—there were many

wars that [were] been fought for national liberation, that were based mainly on capitalist-exploitative principles, and these wars of national liberation seemed to negate the very conditions of human flourishing. They reevaluated their position and found that it was necessary not to be nationalists at all, but internationalists. Nations ceased to exist when the ruling circle of the United States became imperialist when America became an empire.⁸²

It is crucial to note that revolutionary intercommunalism, as imagined by Newton, was not overly theoretical, nor was it understood as such by members of the Party. It was designed as a political epistemology that requires a direct application to the present realities in the material world, especially as it pertains to the experience of oppressed communities in the world. The party took some steps to implement the theory of revolutionary internationalism. Newton offered the National Liberation Front and Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam an undetermined number of troops to assist in their fight against American imperialism. Nguyen Thi Dinh, Deputy commander of the South Vietnamese People's Liberation Armed Forces, accepted the offer in the following manner: "With profound gratitude, we take notice for your enthusiastic proposal; when necessary, we shall call for your volunteers to assist us."⁸³ In offering Panthers to fight in Vietnam, Newton) invoked the spirit of international revolutionary solidarity.⁸⁴ In a very vociferous manner, Newton also declared the successes recorded by oppressed communities beyond the geographical borders of the united states that are putting into practice, his ideas of revolutionary intercommunalism. He asserts thus:

Some communities have begun doing this [practicalizing revolutionary intercommunalism]. They liberated their territories and have established provisional governments. We recognize them and say that these governments represent the people of China, North Korea, the people in the liberated zones of South Vietnam, and the people in North Vietnam. We believe their examples should be followed so that the order of the day would not be reactionary intercommunalism (empire) but revolutionary intercommunalism. The people of the world, that is, must seize the power from the small ruling circle and

expropriate the expropriators, pull them down from their pinnacle and make them equals, and distribute the fruits of our labor, that have been denied us, in some equitable way.⁸⁵

Newton makes it clear that the actual power of revolutionary intercommunalism as a political epistemology rests on the fact that oppressed people can renegotiate their proximity to the hegemonic forces of colonial and imperial institutions, by any means necessary, to reclaim what originally belongs to them through the reordering of mindset and the reshaping of their world-view. In this also lies the demonstration that revolutionary warfare, as well as revolutionary epistemologies, are not merely designed to be a historical concept and a museum piece but as principles and strategies that are real and achievable—especially when furnished and driven by a people whose imperialist subjugation had developed a strong basis for sympathetic alliances or revolutionary fraternities.⁸⁶ In this respect, the establishment of the international section of the BPP as an officially accredited revolutionary movement in Algiers was a major milestone, not only in the development of the Panthers but also in the history of African American international political alliance.⁸⁷

What is truly unique and remarkable about viewing Newton's revolutionary intercommunalism as a kind of Black collectivist epistemology is that it fundamentally regard Blacks in the new world as well as in diaspora as worthy epistemic agents who can transform their social conditions by the utilization of their cognitive, mental and practical skills for revolutionary warfare. In this instance, Black subjects are accorded some form of epistemic responsibility that transcends just the interests of the individual. It is that which focuses on the epistemic and political life of groups and how ideological frameworks can be designed to transform the lived experience or existential condition. Newton also demonstrated a very good understanding of the power that can be derived from the combination of political positioning and

the development of radical political and social knowledge.⁸⁸ He was not merely interested in pursuing political epistemology as a special case of social cognition but more as a set of values that should be directed towards material change. Hence the emphasis he places on Black revolutionaries understanding their placement within social ontology as a central focus of the revolutionary struggle. Knowledge—especially in this case—revolutionary intercommunalism as political epistemology is not merely construed as an embodiment of mentalist or abstract principles but as a system of thinking that is informed and contingent upon material social experiences which is why it is directed towards the development of the Black community in the United States as well as those of oppressed communities around the world. Thus, Newton's political epistemology essentially focuses on community development. This perspective on community development assumes that the people in a community best understand their problems and the solutions that will work for them, and as such, they should be the ones determining what and how the battles should be fought against imperialist exploitation.⁸⁹

Through his political epistemology of revolutionary intercommunalism, Newton highlights the connections between knowledge and social action. Knowledge, both in its abstract and practical forms are directed towards achieving one ultimate goal—liberation from the oppressive antics, tactics, and policies of the state that seeks to condemn Black people and Black communities to a life of hardship and recurrent dehumanizing schemes. This became the basis upon which Newton and the BPP engaged with the people. The people, in turn, formed an affinity or and affiliation with the BPP because they saw the Panthers as providing important models not only for political and social change but for profound personal transformations. The Black Panthers became masters at creating a radical visual and discursive language of affiliation and identification that expressed the need for personal involvement in liberatory social and

political change.⁹⁰ It is something that the community needed to unleash its socially located power to organize as a united front to combat the forces of repression. Newton was able to discover that ignorance was partly responsible for how Black people were being oppressed indiscriminately within and outside the Black community because a lot of folks do not know or possess the education needed to know their rights as well as the constitutional protections accorded to Blacks that could be used to engage with the state. For instance, when the Panthers began to patrol the police force within the Black communities in Oakland and surrounding neighborhoods in the late 60s, members of the Black community were unsure about its legality. But Newton made it a point of instruction by reading out real-time, the legal rules and laws that made such actions legally permissible. Even to the shock of members of law enforcement who were not aware of or of the laws Newton was citing. So, Newton made education (education of members of the Black community) one of the cardinal programs of the BPP.

From the Party's point of view, the people who will form the bedrock of the power of the movement had to be educated and informed about the issues that are at stake and how to engage with the repressive forces of the state successfully. In this regard, George Murray, a San Francisco State instructor and Panther Minister of Education, was designated to lead efforts in the summer of 1968 to develop the Panthers' political education program for members, modeled on Mao's efforts to educate Red Army troops in 1929. Political education classes became a central Party activity, recalled Panther Chief of Staff David Hilliard, through which Party leaders and theoreticians could "disseminate" their ideas to the cadre.⁹¹ Newton conceives of this program for political education as similar to this task of bringing enlightenment to the people just as the case of the prisoner who got free from the shackles of darkness (ignorance) in Plato's allegory of the cave. In this allegory, the other prisoners who remained bound, have been

swallowed up by the well of ignorance and illusions that filled their minds. Newton commented on this further:

They've been there all their lives. At the end of the cave shines a light. Now one person among them knows the light is the sun. The rest are afraid of the light. They've lived in darkness and think that the light is some kind of evil. Now let's say the person who knows about the light tells them it's not evil and tries to lead them out of the cave. They'll fight and probably overpower and maybe even kill him. Because all they know is darkness, and so quite logically they would be fearful of the light. So instead he has to gradually lead them toward the light. Well, it's the same with knowledge. gradually you have to lead people toward an understanding of what's happening...one never drops a flowerpot on the head of the masses.⁹²

It is this same gradualist approach that the Panthers employed in espousing and teaching people within the community about their political epistemologies including the ten-point program that shows that the Party was also interested in the welfare and social well-being of members of the Black community. As the Panthers expanded their educational program, they began to teach children as well as adults. Here too their goal was to transmit the Party's political epistemologies to Blacks living in an environment so oppressive that it precluded their discovering the truth of their despicable conditions. Among the most prominent of the Panther educational programs was a network of "liberation schools" through which the Panthers taught children about the class struggle in terms of Black history. First established in 1969, the Panther liberation schools were perhaps the closest counterpart in the late 1960s of the freedom schools of 1964. Both had an ephemeral existence, but both epitomized the political, pedagogical, and epistemological values of the most dynamic African-American activism of their day. Together, the two programs, therefore, illuminate the evolving relationship between politics and pedagogy.⁹³ The politics of the BPP certainly demonstrated a close affinity between politics and pedagogy especially when this is considered in the light of developing political epistemologies as a template for anti-imperialist and anticolonial confrontation. The people who will constitute the

“ground soldiers” or resistant armies must be able to acquire the knowledge of the basic principle and philosophies driving the process of social mobilization. It is this acquisition of revolutionary knowledge that would become the driving force behind all forms of mobilization or organization against the empire.

Newton was successful in communicating his political epistemological arguments to members of the Black community as well as to people of oppressed communities around the world because he often structurally compared local discrimination to trans-geographical political oppression. For example, he measured the French occupation of Algeria next to the Oakland police, naming the latter as “an occupying army.” Newton was remarkably skilled at analyzing larger structural situations and making them applicable to individual people’s understanding of everyday cultural reality.⁹⁴ He also worked tirelessly to practically demonstrate how his ideas applied to conditions within the global polity, especially his envisioning of how technology would become a dominant tool that the empire would utilize to establish its global dominion through history. Looking through technological realities in contemporary society, one can only imagine the prophetic genius with which Newton predicted this in the late twentieth century. His emphasis on education was geared towards transformational learning, in a bid to get others within the movement to grasp how the political epistemologies and ideologies of the Party are changing with time, as well as the predictions of the future of the movement, based on present realities. This explains why he puts so much effort into educating the youths about the painstaking process of revolution action against the empire. Newton clearly articulated this in a conversation he had with J. Herman Black, Erik H. Erikson and Kai T. Erikson in Oakland California on March 31, 1971, later published under the title, *In Search of Common Ground*, where he asserted thus:

young people generally feel that the role of the revolutionary is to define a set of actions and sets of principles that are easy to identify and are absolute. But what I was trying to explain to them was the process: revolution is a contradiction between the old and the new in the process of development. anything can be revolutionary at a particular point in time, but most of the students don't understand that. And most other people don't understand it either.⁹⁵

In it is in pursuit of this understanding that he vigorously pursued education as one of the central programs within the Panthers' ten-point program. Newton believed that education is a vehicle for achieving both individual and social transformation. He was quite successful in his approach to educational change because (a) he made educational theories explicitly similar to notable revolutionary leaders, associations, and literary texts; (b) he grounded his abstraction in material examples; and (c) he was constantly reformulating his ideology to address Black self-determination and self-education.⁹⁶

Fanning the Flames of Revolutionary Intercommunalism: On the Limits of a Political Epistemology

Newton's formulation of revolutionary intercommunalism as a form of anti-imperialist and anticolonial epistemology has been criticized in recent scholarship for what is deemed as a string of inherent contradictions, limitations, and inconsistencies in the arguments for this epistemological position. For instance, in his work entitled, "A Tension in the Political Thought of Huey P. Newton," Joshua Anderson argues that Newton created an enduring contradiction within the political formation and ideological structures of the BPP for his earliest propagation of the Party as a Black Nationalist organization. He believes that Black nationalism, as an operating political epistemology, never left the Party even after Newton moved on from this position to a reformulated platform (intercommunalism).⁹⁷ As Anderson argues:

The reformulated version of the Platform remained primarily concerned with the African-American community, even though Newton's and the Black Panther Party's awareness of other oppressed communities increased. Newton's and the Black Panther Party's commitment to the uplift of the African-American

community perhaps blinded them to a potential conflict between the Platform and the Party's developing ideology. While it has been noted that Newton did reformulate some of the Platform, there were still aspects of the Platform that maintained the aspects of the Black Panther Party's original Black Nationalist orientation.⁹⁸

So, the logic of Anderson's argument is that the Panthers cannot claim to be truly intercommunalist or internationalists if vestiges of Black nationalism remained within the Party without necessarily falling into a cascade of ideological and intellectual contradictions. These types of critiques were put up to seemingly discredit the legitimacy and to highlight the lack of consistency in Newton's advocacy of an international alliance between oppressed communities of the world such as the Vietnamese and revolutionaries in Africa and Latin America.

However, this critique does not hold water because it does not engage with the substantive arguments that Newton laid out in the discussions about the Party's modus operandi published in the monograph titled, *In Search of Common Ground*. In this work, Newton describes his position in this manner:

I was not satisfied with a statement that I was writing to the Vietnamese because there was a contradiction in it. Let me share this with you. I was telling the Vietnamese that the Party supported nationalism, their revolutionary nationalism, even though we were not nationalists...I disclaim nationalism because it is a thing of the past but that I would support their nationalism, nonetheless. I disclaimed all of the black nationalists in that statement—and of course, that brought about a bad relationship between our Party and other black organizations because all of them, even the bourgeois ones, are somewhat nationalistic in tone and goal.⁹⁹

These are some very crucial aspects of Newton's political epistemology that Anderson failed to engage within his analysis. If an attempt had been made to engage with this, it would have offered a more robust view regarding how Newton resolved the seeming tension between his later advocacy of intercommunalism in place of Black nationalism. This sentiment that Newton expressed in the quote shows the progressive inclination of his political epistemological arguments—it was about looking at changing circumstances in the material world and using that

to recalibrate his philosophical thinking on how best to resolve the contradictions within such existential realities. In *Power to the People: The World of the Black Panthers*, a recently published work by Stephen Shames and Bobby Seale the position of the BPP in moving between ideological phases was further explained. In their view, as a revolutionary organization, the BPP had to be “revolutionary” (open to change) in its ideological and epistemological formations to stay relevant with the times. Although its members were leaders of the Black Power movement, they were not Black nationalists. Their “black pride” was not based on denigrating whites, but on showing the Black community how to take control of its destiny. In this regard, the BPP worked for economic justice and power for all people.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, in *Blood in My Eye*, George Jackson articulated some reasons why the BPP expanded its vision to move beyond parochial Black nationalists’ interest only in the United States. In his view, those who regard themselves as Black partisan (members of the BPP), do not need nationalist affiliations. He claims that for this group of people, national structures are quite simply nonexistent because a people without a collective consciousness that transcends national boundaries—freaks, Afro-Amerikkans, Negroes, even Amerikkans, without the sense of a larger community than their group—cannot affect history.¹⁰¹ In other words, the embrace of an inclusive political epistemology such as revolutionary intercommunalism would allow for a broader impact on humanity.

Meanwhile, some other scholars like Russell Shoatz and Nik Heynen have attempted to read Newton’s revolutionary intercommunalism as a variant of anarchism. They describe this political epistemology as anarchist because its ideological framework or structure was aimed at disrupting and rupturing the “normal” organization of society.¹⁰² They liken the critical and practical project of the BPP to that of anarchist traditions in which social organizing and mobilization was or is not simply about scaled tensions between the state and the local groupings

of people collectively producing alternative ways of life through direct action. Rather, the BPP's organizing efforts were geared towards tapping the roots of socially recognized power as liberatory praxis to disrupt politics within the local environment like never before seen in the United States.¹⁰³ In order to achieve such revolutionary objectives, the Panthers focused on the simultaneous affirmation of the human rights of individual Black Americans and the promotion of the self-determination claims of the Black nation in the United States.¹⁰⁴ Even this act of consciousness-raising to get young minds as well as members of the Black community to get behind the programs of the Party is revolutionary, in a sense. In other words, the substitution of the so-called "normal" organization of society, through the formulation and reformulation of ideologies, has to be one of the most consequential impacts of the BPP on the history of social movements in the United States. In this instance, the ideology of the Party that members be constantly moving, doing, solving, and attacking real problems and the oppressive conditions they live under, while educating the masses of the people, became crucial in how the basic political desires and needs of the people were met.¹⁰⁵

Thus, the anarchist critique is a misjudgment of the overarching significance of Newton's political epistemological arguments as well as the practical programs of the BPP. What is being read as anarchism ought to be read as a righteous politics of disruption of pernicious government policies fueled by extremely narrow capitalist interests of the imperial state that seeks to destroy Black lives. At the heart of the Panthers' anticolonial politics was an analysis of the relationship between urban Black communities and the postwar American metropolis.¹⁰⁶ This analysis revealed to the BPP that the Black community was relegated to the underclass that is constrained to the disempowered rung of the social, political, and economic power—basically going hungry in the assumed "land of milk and honey." This "milk and honey," signifying economic prosperity

was never intended for members of the Black community. In their admittedly raw anticolonial analysis, the Panthers contended that persistent white-enforced segregation had delivered to Black people a measure of power. The power to fight back against the empire. That power is partly generated in spatial confinement—the concentration of African Americans in urban centers, where poverty and hopelessness had created a “lumpen proletariat,” ignorant but teachable, to develop as the core of a revolutionary movement. This did not excuse segregation. But, like their counterparts in colonial resistance in Africa, the Panthers emphasized that the structures of colonial rule (i.e. the ghetto) could be turned against the imperial nation by creative leaders and appropriate strategy.¹⁰⁷ An example of how the Panthers turned Black confinement into sources of political and economic power is how they negotiated with wealthy business owners operating businesses in the Black community to contribute to the free-breakfast program—one of the most important and successful survival programs run by the Party.¹⁰⁸ The Panthers, through their community survival programs, provided a form of education that exposed America’s contradictions and its insatiable appetite for materialism at the poor people’s expense.¹⁰⁹ Newton and members of the BPP were more interested in disrupting the oppressive elements and structures in society or within the empire to create just, a fair and equitable polity where the advancement of the Black race and other oppressed human groups can be assured.

So, Intercommunalism for Newton arose out of two factors. The first is intellectual; it is based on Newton’s understanding of Marx and dialectical materialism. As Newton affirms in his essay, “On the Defection of Eldridge Cleaver from the Black Panther Party,” “[t]he Black Panther Party base its ideology and philosophy on a concrete analysis of concrete conditions, using dialectical materialism as our analytical method.”¹¹⁰ The second factor is both historical and sociological, especially derived from a survey of the rise of American imperialism.

American imperialism had made the possibility of a nation impossible, thus leaving behind a collection of interconnected communities dominated by a small group of ruling elites who control the institutions of the various communities. The upshot of the development to this point is that it has created abundant wealth and incredible advances in technology. However, Newton felt that, at some point, the oppressed groups in these communities would seize the means of production and displace the elites, countering their technological advances through the intercommunal structure of revolution. Revolutionary intercommunalism will then have occurred—or more correctly be occurring—at the point when the people control their destinies and redistribute the wealth, produce, goods, and services of the interconnected communities in an equitable and egalitarian fashion.¹¹¹

However, this aspect of the vision of developing an egalitarian and equitable society that Newton develops in his political epistemology can be criticized for leaning more towards idealism than realism. Even though Newton asserted in *Revolutionary Intercommunalism* that he does not accept idealism, only things the way they are, the logical conclusion of revolutionary intercommunalism, especially the thinking that the oppressed groups of the world, through a united action or mobilization against empire will eventually create a world free from the systematic and structural imbalance that existed in the previous world, amounts to an idealist formulation. For instance, in *Revolutionary Intercommunalism*, Newton argued that “the peoples of the world must unite as one community and then transform the world into a place where people will be happy, wars will end, the state itself will no longer exist, and we will have communism.”¹¹² This sentiment was also echoed by Bobby Seale in *Seize the Time*, who characterizes some of the ideals of the party that may be considered utopian based on its emphasis on building a society founded on absolute equality. He writes thus:

we need to establish a system based on the goal of absolute equality, of all people, and this must be established on the principle of from each and every person, both male and female, according to their ability, and to each and every person, both male and female, according to their needs. We see establishing socialism in the society as a means by which we begin to remove the oppressive social obstacles and hope to build a society where someday a man and a woman can relate to each other totally on the basis of natural attraction.¹¹³

This, at best, is an idealistic construct. Even within the Party's leadership hierarchy, there was no water-tight consensus concerning the *modus vivendi* and operational focus of the party especially when international alliances and connections were being formed with other oppressed groups of the world. It is highly doubtful if humans can ever create a society or a world that will ever be devoid of the unequal practices and structural systems of discrimination. But this does not mean that oppressive and dehumanizing activities should not be combatted. Rather, what is being articulated here is that the challenge or even rupturing of oppressive structural systems should not, as a matter of consequence, be automatically envisioned as creating a "perfect world."

Although, it should be noted that this aspect of Newton's thinking is a vestige of the early Marxist-Lenin economic and social critiques that underscore social contradictions in terms of class struggle between the "haves" and the have-not" (what Newton and other communist-socialists, refers to as the lumpenproletariat). Newton held the conviction that that once the people (lumpenproletariat) gain control of all the productive and institutional units of society—not only factories but the media too; this will enable them to start solving these contradictions. It will produce new values, new identities; it will mold a new and essentially human culture as the people resolve old conflicts based on cultural and economic conditions. Consequently, there will be a qualitative change and the people will have transformed revolutionary intercommunalism into communism.¹¹⁴ But in the case of the Panthers, the contradictions they sought to confront only created more contradictions, imprisonment, political banishment, including other forms of

repressive practices of the state and death. What Newton assumed with his emphasis on intercommunalism as a way of creating a better world is that because, at that point in history when this political epistemology is in operation, people will not only control the productive and institutional units of society, but they will also have seized possession of their subconscious attitudes toward these things; and, for the first time in history they will have more rather than less conscious relationship to the material world—people, plants, books, machines, media, everything—in which they live. So, from the individual perspective, this argument seems to make a lot of sense more than it does when this is projected to the societal or global level. The matrix for measuring man's relations to things in the world would always be different from that used to measure inter-intra-group relations.¹¹⁵

Since the ideas of the Panthers were ahead of its time, it made it open to misinterpretation and misjudgment by many intellectuals who could not fully grasp the tenets and organizing strategies of the BPP. For example, in *An International History of the Black Panther Party* Jennifer B. Smith argues that the Black Panthers' relationship with Cuba in building its international political affiliations and alliances reflected several issues in the Party's history. In her view, the Panthers tended to be somewhat naïve and simplistic when it came to their “hero” nations. They thought that these nations would support them no matter what and had developed perfect societies.¹¹⁶ As they interacted with these nations, they slowly began to realize these countries faced complicated and at times contradictory needs and issues, just as the Panthers did nationally. This argument runs contrary to Newton's theorization of the constant state of contradictions within society that drives all the revolutionary activities of the party. Yet Smith argues further that the Panther leaders and members tended to not examine situations before they commented on and interacted with these circumstances. Their strategic judgment was somewhat

lacking. However, as they became more sophisticated in international affairs, they slowly exercised better judgment, realizing that each situation would have its unique solution and that even revolutionary societies still had many problems.¹¹⁷ This claim by Smith suggests that the Panthers were a group of revolutionaries that were rash in decision making and lacked a sense of good judgment does not hold water when first-hand accounts on the history and practices of the Party are taken into consideration. There are many textual pieces of evidence in print (including autobiographies of members of the central leadership of the BPP) that shows that the Panthers were very methodic and deeply thoughtful and reflexive in how they approached their revolutionary activities. A cursory examination of any of this textual evidence would easily nullify this kind of critique that Smith puts up against “the Panther leaders.”

In this chapter, much has been said about the collectivism and social affiliations that undergirds Newton’s revolutionary intercommunalism as a unique anticolonial/anti-imperialist epistemology. However, beyond recognizing “commonalities” among the peoples oppressed by racial capitalism, Newton contended that the very categories and concepts which defined peoples were becoming obsolete based on constantly changing historical realities. He thought that the early description of the ideological leanings of the Party as nationalism was akin to the thought that they had distinct geographical boundaries. But what society shows were that the United States was constantly re-inventing itself into a global (exploitative) empire though the growth of bureaucratic capitalism in the United States, which required a new understanding of nationalism or the transformed nation. Thus, this led Newton to depart from Lenin’s notion of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism; he argued that capitalism when traversing national boundaries to exploit the wealth and labor of other territories, transformed both the capitalist nation and the subjugated territory. The rapid development of technology led to a shift in the relationships

within and between nations. It also led to the analysis that the development of technology would increase the swiftness with which the ‘message’ of empire can be sent to these territories which then transforms the previous situation. Beyond becoming a colony or a neo-colony, these territories, unable to protect their boundaries, especially their political structure and cultural institutions will no longer retain their identities as nations, just as the United States will no longer be a nation but an empire whose power transcends geographical boundaries.¹¹⁸

What is being described here captures the process of how the empire evolves through a process of colonial transfiguration. It is through colonial transfiguration that empires transform themselves into global hegemonic pillars of exploitation. It is a sense of an identity-formation process that undermines the sovereignty of nations to define themselves for what they are rather as what empire wants them to be. Thus, Newton argued that the creation of an identity that extends beyond family, tribe, or nation—an identity that is essentially human was critical for the survival of human beings. He believes that it is only through revolutionary intercommunalism that such a project can be achieved by the oppressed groups caught in the web of the power-infused process of empiric transfiguration. “If we do not have a universal identity,” he declared to a somewhat hostile audience, “then we will have cultural, racial, and religious chauvinism, the kind of ethnocentrism we have now. Unless we cultivate an identity with everyone, we will not have peace in the world.”¹¹⁹ Much of the resistance to Newton’s concept of intercommunalism—he was once booed while on stage—and the need for a “universal identity” was foreshadowed in the resistance many demonstrated to the BPPs alliances with white radicals, the international focus of its newspaper, and the offer of troops to the National Liberation Front in Vietnam (Viet Cong). Newton, for good reasons, believed that most of his audiences were “not ready for many of the things we talked about” and considered the problem of simplifying

his ideology for the masses to be the BPP's a "big burden."¹²⁰ Following the deep resentment or backlash that was generated within the ranks of the BPP upon his pledge to offer troops in support of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, Newton made it a point of duty to teach members of the BPP about the principles of revolutionary intercommunalism as the next phase of the revolutionary struggle hoping that he would be able to get his members behind this political epistemology.

Many simply could not grasp what the liberation of Black people could have to do with the Vietnamese communists against whom the United States was waging war. The theory of intercommunalism was Newton's attempt to lay out a political, epistemological and economic account of how he understood the world to be structured at the time, under a new type of imperialism—but it was also his attempt at forming a political strategy for how the BPP could expect to move forward in the decades to come as the revolution advanced.¹²¹ Thus, Newton sought to show how his idea of 'intercommunalism' would work in practice, especially the aspects that link the oppression of Black Americans with the colonial logic and machinations of a newly formed, US-enforced global capitalist 'empire.'¹²² Newton's theory of intercommunalism as a whole was informed by a political practice which finds value in the treatment of the problems of race, nationalism, and internationalism, as well as his speculations on the future of surplus populations and questions of class composition, and the role of information technology in future possibilities for struggle.¹²³ He pushed this argument further when examining the possible emergence of a unified revolutionary subject within the United States by positing a relationship between the active processes of reactionary intercommunalism and the destruction of revolutionary potential among the United States population.¹²⁴ At this point, Newton makes a distinction between what he terms the stage of "reactionary

intercommunalism,” in which the imperialists dominate the world’s communities as they now do, and “revolutionary intercommunalism,” when such domination will cease through the grassroots efforts and guerilla warfare that the united oppressed groups of the world would wage against the empire. Newton suggests that the stage of revolutionary intercommunalism will come about when the people seize the means of production [presumably of the entire imperialist system] and distribute the wealth in an equalitarian way to the many communities of the world.¹²⁵

In the manner Newton conceived of revolutionary intercommunalism as a political epistemology, it was aimed at throwing the final blow to the imperialism practices of the colonial or imperial state through the building of global alliances with oppressed communities around the world. The greatness of Newton’s organizing abilities and revolutionary work did not rest in the mere formulation of these epistemological categories as some kind of ideological artifact or archeology of knowledge. Rather, it consists in the practical demonstration of how these ideas would work out in practice. Revolutionary intercommunalism is about freedom—not just freedom from colonial chains and the parasitic consumptive economic policies that the empire state imposed on peoples living in oppressed communities around the world. But also, an epistemological praxis that emphasizes the need for Black subjects to demonstrate freedom of mind or freedom of thought. Newton understands the connections between these two dimensions of the human experience, in terms of gaining freedom from oppressive structures, so much so that he and the members of the BPP established an intercommunalist school/institution to teach Black people how to think in liberating ways for them to grasp the true nature of the conditions of their oppression and how to free themselves from such. Like every other revolutionary leader, Newton and members of the BPP had their flaws and miscalculations on how they engaged with elements of the oppressive imperial state and how they managed personal conflicts and other

human relation issues, but this in itself is what it means to be human. Newton, an ordinary human, led and inspired an extraordinary revolutionary movement in and beyond the United States that deserves serious studies in general intellectual discourse, not just in Black studies or within other specific discourses in Black intellectual history.

In sum, the exposition in this chapter is an attempt to study Newton seriously as a philosopher—more specifically as a Black political epistemologist while exploring the epistemological arguments across the span of his writings, speeches, and archived recordings. A political epistemologist is someone who believes that there is a connection between the phenomenon of human knowledge that can be applied to social reality in ways that are politically relevant to aspects of human life. By every sense of that word, Newton can be categorized as an important Black political epistemologist for insisting that political and revolutionary ideas have to be the very basis through which Black people, in alliance with other oppressed groups in the world, should negotiate the conditions of their living truly free and authentic lives. It is the condition for fighting back against empire “by any means necessary.” As a political epistemologist, Newton understands and appreciates the social value of knowledge in how he organized members of the BPP and other allied revolutionary groups beyond the borders of the United States around his political-philosophical systems, geared towards challenging the powers of empire and providing an avenue for the understanding of how hegemonic societies transform themselves into global exploitative elements as well as forces of mass oppression. Newton is an important Black political epistemologist who created revolutionary intercommunalism as an anti-imperialist and anticolonial epistemology out of a rigorous examination of the existential conditions of Black folks in the United States and the exploitation of oppressed communities in the global sphere by the imperial state and forces of colonial capitalist interests. Although

Newton is not often acknowledged as a philosopher in contemporary scholarship, this work makes a case for a re-imagining of this genius Black intellectual as such—a Black revolutionary epistemologist.

References

1. Huey P. Newton, “Prison, where is thy Victory?” In *If they Come in the Morning*, ed. Angela Y. Davis (New York: Signet, 1971), 62.

2. It is important to clarify the difference between my treatment of Ferguson’s advocacy of Marxism in relation to the Black experience and Newton’s usage of Marxism in relation to the Black condition. My grouse with Ferguson’s emphasis on the ‘importance’ of Marxism to fashioning Black centered ideas in an anti-Black world, centers around his denial of Afrocentric [Black-centered] ways of looking at the world in favor of an uncritical treatment of Marxism, especially the question of the extent to which Marxism relates to the Black condition. Ferguson sees Marxism as the ideological tool through which Blacks can achieving what he regards as “objective reality,” but the problem with this is that it does not allow for other imaginative ways to explore the social, political, and economic questions that evolves from the colonial-imperial exploitation of Blacks within colonies. Ferguson failed to show some of the limitations of Marxism as a praxis for confronting racialized and structural oppression, especially as it pertains to the Black lived experience. Newton, unlike Ferguson, was able to show some of the limitations of Marxism, especially as it has to do with the condition of oppressed Black folks within colonies. In the earliest development of his ideas, Newton was influenced by a broad spectrum of philosophical ideas, including Marxism, to determine their merits and demerits, particularly as it pertains to the question of improving the Black existential condition and the goal of achieving freedom from white-structural and systemic oppression. This is one important way in which Newton critically engaged with the political ideology of Marxism different from how contemporary scholars like Ferguson appropriates the ideology within Black intellectual thought. For Newton, the structural critiques of Marxism—dialectical materialism—helped to expose the viciousness of anti-Black oppression driven by the desire for wealth maximization, acquisition of power, naked show of force within capitalist empires. However, Newton believes that Marxism does not adequately resolve the contradictions within the trajectory of history (dominance and sub-dominance and other slave-master dialectical systems) that perpetually seeks to confine Blacks to an underclass even within the colonies. Also, Newton does not think that Marxism was the only way that Blacks can grasp the nature of social reality—he held an expansive view that radically changes how we view social reality and the dialectics of nature—a somewhat biocentric view that conceives of man (Blacks) as being at one with nature. It is

important to note that Newton did not believe that Blacks (the oppressed) would ever be able to build a “reformed” society with the oppressor (powerful whites) on an equal basis, which is a departure from Marxism’s idealist imagery of a world where the oppressed and the oppressor would be able to co-exist after the structures of oppression and class systems have been destroyed by the rebellion of the proletariat class. This is one of the reasons why Newton would transmogrify his views from Black nationalism to Revolutionary Intercommunalism—moving away from parochial (nationalist) demands for liberation to building a global alliance of Black people fighting against the psychological and physical warfare of colonization and imperialism, often disguised under the cloak of liberal democracy.

3. Elaine Brown, “Introduction to the 2019 Edition,” in *The New Huey P. Newton Reader*, eds. David Hilliard and Donald Wise (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2019), 22.

4. Huey P. Newton and Erik H. Erikson, *In Search of Common Ground* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973), 133.

5. Pietro D. Omodeo, *Political Epistemology: The Problem of Ideology in Science Studies* (Switzerland: Springer, 2019), 2.

6. Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1970), 393.

7. Pietro D. Omodeo, *Political Epistemology*, 13.

8. Scott Althaus, Mark Bevir, Jeffrey Friedman, Hélène Landemore, Rogers Smith and Susan Stokes, “Roundtable on Political Epistemology,” *Critical Review: A Journal of Politics and Society* 26, nos., 1-2 (2014): 2.

9. Albenaz Azmanova, “The Political Epistemology of Judgment,” in *The Scandal of Reason* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 161.

10. Ibid.

11. Scott Althaus, Mark Bevir, Jeffrey Friedman, Hélène Landemore, Rogers Smith and Susan Stokes, “Roundtable on Political Epistemology,” 3.

12. Ibid., 5.

13. Toni Morrison, *The Source of Self-Regard* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019), 34.

14. Ibid.

15. Huey P. Newton, *War Against the Panthers: A Study of Repression in America*,” (PhD Diss., UC Santa Cruz, 1980), 3.

16. Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 295.

17. David Hilliard and Donald Weise, ed., *The New Huey P. Newton Reader* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2019), 143.

18. Ibid., 146.

19. The concept of revolutionary suicide is not defeatist or fatalistic. On the contrary, it conveys an awareness of reality because the revolutionary must always be prepared to face death and hope because it symbolizes a resolute determination to bring about change. Above all, it demands that the revolutionary see his death and his life as one piece. See. David Hilliard, Keith Zimmerman and Kent Zimmerman, *Huey: Spirit of the Panther* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2006), 292.

20. Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 197.

21. Mumia Abu-Jamal, *We Want Freedom: A Life in the Black Panther Party* (Massachusetts: South Bend Press, 2004), 82.

22. Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 12.
23. Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, Trans. John Veitch (New York: Cosimo, 2008), p.115. Originally published in 1924.
24. Huey P. Newton, “The Mind is Flesh: 1974,” in *The New Huey P. Newton Reader*, eds. David Hilliard and Donald Wise (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2019), 334.
25. Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 249.
26. Huey P. Newton, “The Mind is Flesh: 1974,” 334.
27. *Ibid.*, 336.
28. *Ibid.*, 338.
29. Huey P. Newton, “Eve, the Mother of All Living: 1974” in *The New Huey P. Newton Reader*, eds. David Hilliard and Donald Wise (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2019), 332.
30. Huey P. Newton, “The Mind is Flesh: 1974,” 339.
31. *Ibid.*, 338.
32. *Ibid.*, 340.
33. *Ibid.*, 345-346.
34. Huey P. Newton, “Dialectics of Nature: 1974,” in *The New Huey P. Newton Reader*, eds. David Hilliard and Donald Wise (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2019), 328.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*
38. Jan-Georg Deutsch, “Colonial Modernities: A view from the Imperial Verandah, c. 1880-1960,” in *Echoes of Empire: Memory, Identity and Colonial Legacies* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 35-46.
39. Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Intercommunalism & the Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, ed. Amy Gdala (Wales, UK: Superscript, 2004), 31.
40. Akinwale O. c, “Repression Breeds Resistance: The Black Liberation Army and the Radical Legacy of the Black Panther Party,” in *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party*, eds. Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas (New York: Routledge, 2001), 15.
41. According to Amy Gdala, Huey P. Newton’s exposition of the concept of Revolutionary intercommunalism (RI) is the most progressive, most logical and most hopeful political idea since Ghandi developed the principle of non-violent direct action. In this vein, she considers Newton’s dialogues on intercommunalism as the quintessence of permanent revolution on the noumenal plane, beckoning to mankind to struggle without end, a struggle without which their lives would be wasted in history. See. Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Intercommunalism*, 20/33.
42. Mumia Abu-Jamal, *We Want Freedom*, 106.
43. Huey P. Newton, “War Against the Panthers, 4.
44. Albert Wirz and Andreas Eckert, “The Scramble for Africa: Icon and Idiom of Modernity,” in *From Slave to Empire: Europe and the Colonization of Black Africa 1780—1880s*,” ed. Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau (New York: Routledge, 2004), 133-153.
45. Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Intercommunalism*, 29.
46. *Ibid.*, 32.
47. Elaine Brown, “Introduction to the 2019 Edition,” 23.
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49. Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton: The Radical Theorist* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 62.
50. Although the Panthers kept their revolutionary nationalist views fairly intact during Huey Newton's imprisonment, that changed upon his release in August 1970. Reflecting the impact of an increasingly global consciousness on his thinking, Newton once again transformed the Black panther ideology but retained the basic elements of revolutionary nationalism as far as coalition politics was concerned. The new Panther ideology represented a transition to revolutionary internationalism. See. Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 169.
51. Omari L. Dyson, "Nesting the Black Panther Party in the zeitgeist of Uncertainty," In *On the Ground: The Black Panther Party in Communities across America*, Judson L. Jeffries, ed. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 279.
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60. Kenneth B. Clark, *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power* (New York: Harper & Row 1965), 223.
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<https://www.viewpointmag.com/2018/06/11/intercommunalism-the-late-theorizations-of-huey-p-newton-chief-theoretician-of-the-black-panther-party/>
62. David Hilliard, Keith Zimmerman and Kent Zimmerman, *Huey: Spirit of the Panther*, 236.
63. Jennifer B. Smith, *An International History of the Black Panther Party* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 70.
64. Sean L. Malloy, *Out of Oakland: Black Panther Party Internationalism During the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 112.
65. In "An Account of Group Knowledge, Raimo Tuomela argues that although a group can be conceived as an agent, it is not a mentalist understanding of agency by which they are expected to have a mind. For this reason, mental attributes are only "extrinsically" attributed to it. What it is for a group to believe, in the central case of a "group-socially normatively binding group belief," is for there to be grounds for reasoning and acting on the belief that are internal to the group, i.e., directed toward achieving the group ethos. A group's normatively binding belief depends on members' beliefs (directed toward this goal), since a group functions only by the functioning of its members. See. Raimo Tuomela, "An Account of Group Knowledge," in *Collective Epistemology*, eds. Hand B. Schmid, Daniel Sirtes and Marcel Weber (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 2011).
66. George Jackson, *Blood in my Eye* (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1990), 12.

67. Ibid., 105.
68. Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967); Stokely Carmichael, "From Black Power to Pan-Africanism," A Speech delivered at Whittier College, Whittier, California on March 22, 1971; James A. Tyner, "Defend the Ghetto: Space and the Urban Politics of the Black Panther Party," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96 (2006): 105-118.
69. The peoples of Africa have scored outstanding successes in the struggle for national liberation. The first half of the 1970s ushered in the final stage of the downfall of the colonial system on this continent. For a long time the imperialist powers had hoped in earnest that decolonization in Asia and Africa would result in no more than a partial loss of political domination and that they would be able to retain the economic levers of exploitation of the peoples in the newly free countries and retain control over those countries' social processes. The neocolonialists refused to understand that the peoples' urge for genuine national independence and social progress was inexorable, that it was impossible to quell it with false promises. For most countries, the winning of political independence has become a starting point in the struggle for complete equality in the world community. See. E.A. Tarabrin, "The Present Stage of the Anti-Imperialist Struggle," in *Neocolonialism and Africa in the 1970s*, ed. E.A. Tarabin (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 14-15.
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80. David Hilliard, ed. *The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service*, 270.
81. Judson L. Jeffries, *Huey P. Newton*, 63.
82. Göran Hugo Olsson, *The Black Power Mixtape*, 103.
83. Charles E. Jones, *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 170.
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94. Matthew W. Hughey, "The Pedagogy of Huey P. Newton: Critical Reflections on Education in His Writings and Speeches," *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 2 (November 2007): 213.
95. Huey P. Newton and Erik H. Erikson, *In Search of Common Ground*, 108.
96. *Ibid.*, 212.
97. It is pertinent to note that the idea of reform that Newton had in mind always included his ideas of revolution in all of its transitional phases. According to Bobby Seale, one has to understand that Huey understood the difference between reform and revolution. Huey understood that you answer the momentary desires and needs of the people, that you try to instruct them and politically educate them, that these are their basic political desires and needs, and from the people themselves will rage a revolution to make sure they have these basic desires and needs fulfilled. He also related to what all these revolutionary leaders of the world said we must do, what we must establish, what we must institutionalize. That's very important. This is the way the program was written. Huey always had the people's desires and political needs in mind. He always had the revolutionary tactics and the revolutionary means in mind as to how the people must go about getting these things, getting these basic desires and needs. See. Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1970), 62-63.
98. Joshua Anderson, "A Tension in the Political Thought of Huey P. Newton," *Journal of African American Studies* 16 (2012): 257.
99. Huey P. Newton and Erik H. Erikson, *In Search of Common Ground*, 133.
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108. In order to achieve its goals of organizing and serving Black and oppressed communities, the Black Panther Party developed a wide variety of survival programs since the party's founding in October 1966. The programs, which cover such diverse areas as health care and food services, as well as a model school, the Intercommunal Youth Institute, were meant to meet the needs of the community until they can all move to change social conditions that make it impossible for the people to afford the things they need and desire. The intercommunal Youth Institute was established in January 1971 by the Black Panther Party. The institute was initiated in direct response to the public-school system, which has systematically produced individuals totally inescapable of thinking in an analytical way. The rationale for creating this school was that the public system had failed to educate Black and poor youth, and this has caused generation after generation of people from these communities to be inadequately prepared to participate and survive in such a highly technological society. It is in a bid to break this seemingly endless cycle of oppression that the Black Panther Party established the Youth Institute. See. David Hilliard, ed., *The Black Panther Party Service to the People Programs* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 3-5.

109. Omari L. Dyson, "Nesting the Black Panther Party in the zeitgeist of Uncertainty," 278.

110. David Hilliard, ed. *The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service*, 213.

111. Joshua Anderson, "A Tension in the Political Thought of Huey P. Newton," 255-256.

112. Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Intercommunalism*, 55.

113. Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time*, 394.

114. Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Intercommunalism*, 45.

115. Ibid.

116. This statement does not acknowledge the fact that other revolutionary leaders across the world admired and committed themselves to the cause of the BPP. Granted that at the time the Panthers developed their radical alliances with Cuba in the late 60s, it was shifting its position in the international socialist's bloc, which had both practical and ideological implications for the Party. But to claim that the Panthers were blindsided by these realities is to make a disingenuous argument. Also, the case of Cuba was very dissimilar to that of China where the Panthers made more connection due to the Panthers' ideological alliance with the radical politics of Mao. Mao was a hero to Newton, who co-founded the Black Panther Party 50 years ago on October 15, 1966, the same year Mao kicked off the Cultural Revolution in China. The controversial radical group, which at its peak reached thousands of members, suffered deaths both revolutionary and reactionary. In September 1971, Newton traveled, with his fellow comrades Elaine Brown and Robert Bay, to mainland China (via Canada, Tokyo, and Hong Kong). They met with Premier Zhou Enlai and Mao's wife Jiang Qing, attended a reception in the massive ceremonial building the Great Hall of the People, and toured factories, schools, and communes across the country. The Panthers received enormous support from China and even went as far as offering Newton political asylum from his political trials in the United States. See. Sean L. Malloy, *Out of Oakland*, 138 and Eveline Chao, "Let One Hundred Panthers Bloom: The Panthers and Mao Zedong," *The China File*, October 14, 2016. chinafile.com/viewpoint/let-one-hundred-panthers-bloom

117. Jennifer B. Smith, *An International History of the Black Panther Party*, 71.

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CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: EXPANDING THE FRONTIERS OF KNOWLEDGE IN AFRICANA PHILOSOPHY— THE CASE FOR BLACK EPISTEMOLOGY

It is true, of course, that many of the works of Black writers contain philosophical ideas, either explicitly stated or at least implicit. But the task of digging out these philosophies from works that were not intended to be primarily philosophical was [deemed] scarcely appropriate to the philosophy classroom

~ Carl Spurney, 1971

The marginalization of [B]lack philosophers from the rest of the “profession,” however, stretches back as far as ancient Greece and Africa

~ Carlin Romano, 2012

The artist then, [like the Black philosopher], is the guardian of image; the writer is the myth-maker of his people. We still at times are not sure as to how much of our image is us; to what extent we are the sole authors of our myth, our peoplehood.

~ Carolyn Gerald, 1971

This work, through its advocacy of Black epistemology as a new sub-disciplinary focus in Africana philosophy, makes a case for a different approach to doing Africana philosophy in the twenty-first century. This approach favors a strategic move in Africana/Black scholarship to focus on Black thinkers as important scholars, whose philosophical deliberations deserves serious intellectual consideration. This approach is a deviation from the extraverted epistemological posture through which the philosophical production by Black scholars has been

characterized in current scholarship. What the breath of Black intellectual production explored in this work have shown is that a careful historical study of Black intellectual history would reveal that Black thinkers have been interested in and have engaged with questions concerning the phenomenon of human knowledge, questions around human agency, including practical considerations regarding the value of knowledge. These are important considerations that offer a different perspective on how the philosophical works of Black thinkers should be engaged with both historically and contemporaneously. In current scholarship, Black thinkers are not considered as philosophers whose thoughts and ideas deserve disciplinary specialization, even though they wrote copious volumes that show their in-depth understanding of the human condition, and their insistence that the human condition can be improved through philosophical principles and knowledge categories, albeit they dedicated their analyses to the Black condition. This dissertation work makes the argument that the future of intellectual engagement within Africana/Black philosophy should be geared towards the creation of new vistas of knowledge exploring the richness of the historiography of Black intellectual thought. This is the justification for the advancement of “Black epistemology,” as a new sub-disciplinary focus within Africana philosophy.

Unlike in the traditional view of epistemology or the theory of knowledge, where the phenomenon of human knowledge is cataloged in abstract terms, such as doxa, qualia, and other mentalist properties, the phenomenon of human knowledge under Black epistemology is considered mainly from the standpoint of embodied subjectivity, to encompass the Black lived experience, Black agency as well as the connections between an epistemic agent and social properties in the world. In this instance, Black epistemology is characterized as “the study or theory of the knowledge generated out of the African-American existential condition, that is, of

the knowledge and cultural artifacts produced by African-Americans based on African-American cultural, social, economic, historical, and political experience.”¹ In other words, Black epistemology in an anti-black world is not merely focused on an investigation of the nature of truth in itself, phenomenal experience or the nature of knowledge for the sake of it because Black subjects do not have the luxury of wallowing in empty existential abstractions in such a world which persistently seeks to trivialize what it means to exist in Black and ultimately negate Black existence. This implies that the ever-present threat to Black existence in an anti-Black society, inadvertently conditions this form of epistemological production to seek ways of improving the Black condition. The two broad epistemological categories highlighted in this work, namely self/personal epistemologies and political epistemologies, was aimed at showing how Black thinkers, explored these two subtleties of epistemic thinking in specific relation to the Black condition.

Thus, the general orientation of the epistemological discourse pursued in this work is inverted because it is mostly looking inwards—using methodologies, ideas, and theories developed by Black thinkers to address issues related to the Black condition both in African and African diasporic contexts. It is a rejection of the extraverted epistemological posture that is advocated in previous Africana philosophical scholarship which breeds a “victimology” orientation. This orientation favor approaches focusing on efforts by African Americans and Blacks in the diaspora to shape their destiny (Africana/Black agency). It surveys interpretation of agency and epistemic authority in contemporary scholarship through a framework of analysis that explores the effects of historical forces in shaping current conditions (continuing historical influences). While looking at representative Black thinkers between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this work utilizes multiple analytical methods and modes of presentation to research

and articulate the complexities and importance of Black epistemological contributions to the lives of peoples of African descent. Through the emphasis on knowledge formation and the global alliance of Black political epistemologies, it explored aspects of historical and continuing cultural and political linkages between Africans in Africa and Africans in the Diaspora.² What is crucial in how the discourse of Black epistemology is approached in this work, is that it encompasses the gamut of episteme and knowledges that speaks specifically to the Black existential condition. These include the spectrum of philosophical ideas developed by Black intellectuals touching on the robustness of the Black experience, culture, genius, ideas, including forms of Black intellectual creations that explores the architecture of Black struggles against the powerful forces of oppression, slavery, colonialism, racism, and imperialism in an anti-black society. Thus, Black epistemology is focused on understanding and grappling with the truth of the Black condition—the livity of Black people. It is a practical epistemology that uncovers practical solutions to the numerous problems that confront Black people.

I argued against the pretentiousness of race-neutral scholarship under the regime of multi-disciplinarity and philosophical pluralism.³ For instance, in “A Future for Africana (Post-) Analytic Philosophy,” Paul C. Taylor characterizes the epistemological thrust of Africana scholarship as that which should focus on pushing “the boundaries of [western] analytic philosophy,” because “we cannot simply write off the entire approach as bankrupt.”⁴ So, he maintains that Africana/Black philosophers need to push the boundaries of western analytic philosophy toward what he refers to as a *post-analytic* philosophy.⁵ I consider this as a misguided preoccupation because it characterizes the thrust of Africana/Black scholarship as a field of inquiry that exists primarily to do the bidding of “western analytic philosophy.” What Taylor conceives as the epistemological thrust of Africana philosophy is essentially a

rehabilitative project that aims to identify the limitations of a disciplinary formation that does not take Black intellectual thought seriously. It is difficult to conceive of the plausibility of such a project as advocated by Taylor (as well as other scholars sympathetic to this worldview), especially “in an academic environment in which Black philosophers are regularly characterized as not doing ‘real’ philosophy in virtue of their choosing to grapple with the topic of racial injustice and related themes.”⁶ This proposal that Taylor puts forward assumes that the “relentless” pushing of the western canon by Black philosophers would have some effect in pulling out the discipline of Africana/Black philosophy from its current position of liminality within the philosophical edifice to the position of equanimity. Even though “since the 1970s Black philosophers have criticized, attacked, and attempted to reform the discipline with little effect.”⁷ So, my work offers arguments against the reconstructionist epistemological project in Africana philosophy, insisting that:

Black philosophy’s success is not going to be found in its ability to change the disciplinary programs of knowledge. Mainstream philosophy, the white majority in the discipline, is not going to miraculously change after almost 50 years of being confronted with its anthropological limitations and illusory concepts.⁸

In “Black Critics and the Pitfalls of Canon Formation,” Cornel West offers a set of arguments similar to that of Taylor, maintaining that for any serious discussion or canon formation of the Africana/Black philosophical edifice to take place, this must happen through focusing on a wholesale reconsideration of the philosophical canon already in place (the western philosophical canon).⁹ He considers this as an important task that Africana/Black philosophers should embark upon because of its epistemological promise of breaking new grounds of knowledge through a constant “struggle” against and critique of, the “established” western philosophical canon.¹⁰ As West writes:

...as cultural critics [and philosophers] attuned to political conflict and struggle inscribed within the rhetorical enactments of texts, we should relate such conflict and struggle to larger institutional and structural battles occurring in and across societies, cultures, and economies...the key here is not mere interdisciplinary work that traverses existing boundaries of disciplines but rather the more demanding efforts of pursuing dedisciplinizing modes of knowing that call into question the very boundaries of the disciplines themselves.¹¹

What West suggests here as the task of Africana philosophy is a reconstructionist project that operates on an extraverted epistemology under the guise of interdisciplinarity or trans-disciplinary scholarship. In a vein similar to that West, Lucius Outlaw argues that Black philosophers should focus their efforts on the reconstruction of the history of western philosophy and its relations to peoples on the African continent and Blacks generally. This is imagined as a pathway for generating intersecting or inter-cultural philosophical praxis that, in the end, does not prioritize the ideas of important figures within Black intellectual history. Although Outlaw believes that such an endeavor needs to work to recover and rehabilitate African-descended thinkers from earlier periods as precursor and pioneer Black philosophers, and to significant moves to deconstruct and revise narratives of the histories of philosophical enterprises in the west and particular aspects of their agendas. This suggestion runs into problems when we consider that most of the African-descended thinkers that Outlaw references were not interested in having such trans-disciplinary narratives of the history of philosophy, especially within the western or Euro-American canon.¹² Also, he argues that “the majority of cross-cultural/multicultural research seems to emphasize problems or pathology - cultural deprivation, adjustments, pluralism, interpersonal relationships, and tensions [often] associated with Black people.”¹³ Its major weakness consists in the fact that it does not offer a humanizing vision of Blackness, which is of primary concern in this work.

The discourse of Black epistemology that I imagined for the future of Africana philosophy, does not look to creating “alliances” with philosophical systems that seek to undermine Black genius or Black intellectual creativity through disguised schemes of “trans-disciplinary” or “intersecting” scholarship. It also does not favorably consider intellectual proposals that offer a reductionist account of Black genius or Black intellectual creativity. I argued against epistemological reductionism in Africana/Black philosophy which undermines the serious philosophical considerations that Black philosophers have given to the discussions about the acquisition and utilization of knowledge as a programmatic element for racial transformation and uplift. Especially the reduction of the gamut of knowledge produced by Black intellectuals throughout human history as mere critiques of racism and group oppression or as philosophies of survival. For instance, in *Contemporary Black Philosophy*, Denis Hickey describes Black philosophy as a general philosophy of survival detailing how a people survived through centuries of slavery, and how a people can continue to survive despite the misunderstanding, not to mention the racial intolerance, of the white majority in the United States.¹⁴ These kinds of categorical descriptions of the tenets of Black philosophy, especially by those who are writing from a standpoint that is outside of the Black experience, does not capture the deeper substance of Black philosophical reflection through the history of white racialized oppression against non-white peoples in the global sphere. Several Black philosophers acknowledged that their social concerns played into white media clichés of Black thinkers as automatic activists and symbols.¹⁵ This means that social expectations were the most important motivating factors that drive this process of intellectual engagement.

The generation of social knowledge, science, cultural artifacts, and so on by subjugated people is in part influenced and informed by historical, cultural, and political contexts. Such knowledge comes out of a critical examination of the paradigms the dominant society uses to understand and control them.¹⁶

In this case, it is always the perspectives or theoretical models of the dominant cultural and philosophical perspective that shapes the bodies of knowledge that is produced (if any) within such interdisciplinary platforms. This is why “Black philosophy has a responsibility to engage the Black experience as a genuine site of existential reflection and epistemological tool making.”¹⁷ It does not need to pursue other externally oriented projects that do not prioritize the *life and times* of Black folks. Essentially, its emphasis should be embracing the breath of knowledges and philosophical corpus that has been produced by Black thinkers specifically to explore knowledge as a social phenomenon, and this was cultivated to achieve freedom from the systems of oppression that confronts Black people in various historical moments in the new world and Africa.

Apart from the suggestion that multidisciplinary should be the epistemological structure behind work being done in Africana/Black philosophical scholarship, this work also addressed the lure towards what is regarded as a “universalist” orientation of scholarship within Africana philosophy which embraces a regime of imagined inclusivity in knowledge production without truly upsetting the “canonized” order of knowledge. As Lucius Outlaw notes, the thrust of scholarly reflection in this area of inquiry should be projected to encompass the range of universality of the term “Africana,” traversing its boundaries and “contents,” while at the same time coinciding with experiences and situated practices of a dispersed geographic race.¹⁸ One could see why the advocacy of such an approach to Africana/Black philosophical scholarship could be very tempting; it has the potential of plugging into the assumptions of the notions of shared humanism that does not translate into any meaningful or concrete benefits for populations that are undermined and devalued in the present order of knowledge. Even when quoted, African-American or Black knowledge has had little impact on dominant paradigms. We must

look for the reason for such marginalization in the emancipatory and empowering nature of serious dialogue and debate within the scholarship produced by people of color.¹⁹

Nonetheless, Outlaw advocates move towards a praxis of philosophical pluralism in his suggestion that since the art of philosophizing is inherently grounded in socially shared practices, not in transcendental rules, it follows that when we view philosophical practices historically, sociologically, and comparatively, we are led inescapably to conclude that philosophical practice is inherently pluralistic and all philosophical ideals are local to communities of thinkers.²⁰

However, philosophical pluralism is an ideal that has not been accorded to localized communities of thinkers that are from subordinated groups within society. This is why I agree with the view that race-neutral or universalist philosophies often depending on the illusion of a universal humanist orientation as deeply problematic because it often misses what is concretely at stake in the diagnosis and analyses of anti-Black racism in the contemporary society.²¹

The positive upshot of this project consists in its insistence that Black thinkers should be considered, primarily as epistemologists who developed sophisticated epistemic notions of the self and social epistemic ascriptions beyond the self, in a bid to challenge hegemonic and negative allusions to Blackness is “canonized” scholarship, and to transform our understanding of embodied Black subjectivity in the world. Where necessary, historical analysis was pursued to underscore the deep philosophical problems that the present order of knowledge presents for our understanding of the “epistemic agent.” Especially noting the exclusionary ways that these notions of self, rationality, epistemic authority and other symbolic markers of the agency have been ascribed in historical scholarship. The goal for this pursuit is aimed at offering a positive vision of Blackness such that the symbolic markers of agency are not considered as a derivative

of alien systems of knowledge but as that which is embedded in the very philosophical thinking processes of the Black thinkers considered in this work.

In the manner Black epistemology is considered in this work, the Black subject was made alive to its social context of knowledge-formation (the situatedness of knowledge), as well as offering a perspective of what the expression of subjectivity looks like expressed in liberated in terms as an existential embodiment. This work does not prioritize the divination of systems of oppression and pusillanimous social practices conscripted within the dominant frames of knowledge, as the “norm” of understanding the world *as it is* rather than *as it appears*. Rather, it seriously engages with the thoughts of Black thinkers as important philosophical roadmaps for fashioning the future of Africana/Black scholarship. Through the careful and rigorous analyses of the aspects of the thoughts or intellectual contributions of representative Black thinkers, from the 19th century through the 20th century, especially the aspects of their ideas that are distinctively philosophical, this work demonstrates that there is a rich legacy of epistemological production within Black intellectual history that needs to be tapped to fortify the discourse in this proposed new area of sub-disciplinary focus within Africana philosophy—Black epistemology.

This dissertation is an attempt to expand the frontiers of knowledge within Africana philosophy. It examines questions concerning what it means to conceive of the Black subject as a knowledgeable being within systems that do not even categorize them as human. It also examines how the uniqueness of the Black experience both in African and African diasporic contexts, shaped social knowledge production as well as the formation of political epistemologies to shape the destinies and improve social outcomes for Black folks.²² Thus, by the very ways in which the phenomenon of human knowledge is examined concerning the Black subject, in this work, it is disrobed from the usual garb of abstractions with which it is clothed in

the present order of knowledge. It is more focused on the social and practical value of human knowledge, especially in the way and manner Black leaders of social movements and philosophers have understood the phenomenon. Contrary to recent trends in Africana philosophical scholarship where knowledge production by Black intellectuals is projected as that which should be “in the service” of dominant systems of knowledge, this work argues for a renewed sense of intellectual positioning within the discourse of Africana/Black philosophy that takes on a new orientation that primarily focuses on the Black subject as occupying a place of salience in philosophical musings. In other words, the Black subject must be considered and seen as the grounding from which we should understand and determine what social problems or issues deserves to be centered and how we should engage in philosophical theorizing.

This work is an attempt to emphasize the need for specialization in disciplinary engagements within Africana/Black philosophical scholarship. Although the scope of this research, requires the tapering of the breath of its intellectual exploration, it does not take away from the fact that it expands on the vision for scholarly work within this disciplinary specialization. Particularly, the case for a Black epistemological study within Africana philosophy was made as a matter of necessity, especially within a social climate that perpetually seeks to silence Blackness in issues concerning the life of the mind. To highlight the genius of Black philosophers—who are considered primarily as social epistemologists in this work, two epistemological categories were underscored, namely self/personal epistemologies and political epistemologies. The exploration of these epistemological categories in the thoughts of the selected Black thinkers shows the importance of their numerous contributions not just to the phenomenon of human knowledge in itself but also to, broadly, human civilization. They wrote from the standpoint of the Black subject and the subject-object relation in the world and how the

continuum between agency and control of epistemic processes can be established by the logic of self-knowledge.

What is particularly interesting in such exposition is that although Black philosophers or thinkers are not often regarded as epistemologists, a careful study of their works (especially those studied in this research), shows the painstaking effort they put in into espousing knowledge as the grounds for personal and social transformation. However, it deserves to be mentioned that the thrust of this project consists in its initiation or foregrounding of discussions about how Black knowledges, formulated in different existential conditions, have been geared towards improving the Black condition, and why such efforts deserve special disciplinary attention under Africana philosophy. There is no gainsaying the fact that much work still needs to be done in order to expand this proposed area of epistemological inquiry within Africana/Black philosophical scholarship. This dissertation work is crucially important because it lays a foundation for future work in expanding this area of inquiry.

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3. In this regard, Kwame Appiah notes that even though the call for interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary scholarship is common today—especially in the abstract characterizations of human thinking, there has not been an equally extensive exploration of the question how racism has misguided our more abstract reflections; of how the absence of black voices has shaped our philosophical discourse. See. Kwame A. Appiah, "African-American Philosophy?" in *African-American Perspectives and Philosophical Traditions*, ed. John P. Pittman (New York: Routledge, 1997), 31.
4. Paul C. Taylor, "A Future for Africana (Post-) Analytic Philosophy," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 108, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 505.
5. Ibid.
6. Tina F. Botts, Liam K. Bright, Myisha Cherry, Guntur Mallarangeng, Quayshawn Spencer, "What is the State of Blacks in Philosophy?" *Critical Philosophy of Race* 2, no. 2 (2014): 226.
7. Tommy J. Curry and Gwenetta Curry, "On the Perils of Race Neutrality and Anti-Blackness: Philosophy as an Irreconcilable Obstacle to (Black) Thought," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 77, nos., 3-4 (May-September 2018): 660.
8. Ibid., 667.
9. Cornel West, *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 35.
10. West conceives of this kind of critique as a prophetic criticism. He describes prophetic criticism as that which suffers from a kind of Du Boisian double consciousness – of *being* deeply shaped by Euro-American modernity – is what we get when Africans in the Americas, confronting their exclusion to remake and recreate themselves into a distinctly *new* people – a world-historical and monumental process in which oppressed and degraded people invent themselves in alien circumstances and with alien languages and products. See. Cornel West, *Keeping Faith*, xii.
11. Ibid., 39.
12. Lucius Outlaw, "African, African American, Africana Philosophy," *African-American Perspectives and Philosophical Traditions*, ed. John P. Pittman (New York: Routledge, 1997), 76.
13. Beverly, M. Gordon, "The Necessity of African-American Epistemology," 89.
14. Denis Hickey, *Contemporary Black Philosophy* (Pasadena, CA: The Williams & Williams Publishers, 1971), 198.
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16. Beverly, M. Gordon, 91.
17. Tommy J. Curry and Gwenetta Curry, "On the Perils of Race Neutrality and Anti-Blackness," 681.
18. Lucius Outlaw, "African, African American, Africana Philosophy," 72.

19. Beverly, M. Gordon, "The Necessity of African-American Epistemology," 90.

20. Lucius Outlaw, 73.

21. Tommy J. Curry and Gwenetta Curry, 657.

22. Here, I agree with Lucius Outlaw's assessment that tracing the connections between Black thinkers in different diasporic contexts is something that is obviously missing in current work of African-American philosophers: namely, research work that is conducted with little or no knowledge of, or attention to, the history of philosophical activity on the African continent or elsewhere in the African diaspora. At the very least, this lack of awareness and attention may well contribute to deficiencies in our historically informed self-understandings and, to that extent, will have important implications for the work we do whether or not we take our work to be distinguished, or at least conditioned in significant ways, by our being persons of African descent. See. Lucius Outlaw, "African, African American, Africana Philosophy," 71.